

Radical Marriage: A New Tool for Teaching Effective Communication

David and Darlene Steele, authors of *Radical Marriage: Your Relationship as Your Greatest Adventure*, work together as a counseling, coaching, and teaching/presenting team. They delight in helping couples envision the relationship they want and learn ways to make their dreams come true and open up new possibilities for growth. Early in their work, the Steeles discovered how much easier it is to revitalize relationships instead of trying to repair them after they fail. Out of their own experiences and their work with other couples, they developed a Radical Marriage approach, based on five basic promises made by both partners: 1) “to love you every day;” 2) “to choose you first;” 3) “to take responsibility;” 4) “to say ‘yes;’” and 5) “to be your hero.” They teach couples in conflict to look for a “third option” instead of either trying to win. A creative solution that meets the needs of both is far better than a compromise that satisfies neither.

The Steeles offer a Communication Map based on “Nine Rules of the Road:”

1. Issues are unmet needs.
2. All issues are valid.
3. The person with the unmet need owns the issue.
4. One issue at a time.
5. One person speaks at a time.
6. Speak with moderation.
7. Listen with curiosity.
8. Assume you can find a way for both to win.
9. Nurture the space between you.

Key to effective use of this process is the realization that when your partner has an issue, it is because of an unmet need. If you can stay curious and concerned and eager to make things better, a good outcome is highly likely. Reactivity, judgment, and defensiveness take the focus off your partner’s need and create roadblocks to a successful resolution. Use compassionate responses, such as “Help me understand” and “Is there more?” whenever a spouse is upset or tries to communicate about an issue.

Visit www.TheCommunicationMap.com for a tutorial on this process and to purchase a laminated copy to post in your home or classroom. This tool would be a valuable addition to any other relationship or communication class you might be offering. Sometimes presenting basic skills (“I” messages, Active Listening, No-lose Problem-solving) in a new and vivid format enhances understanding and increases mastery. The more couples get to practice a process like this in a supportive setting, the more likely they will use it in their interactions at home and in other settings as well.

In addition to a book titled *The Communication Map*, which provides more information about this tool, the Steeles offer *The Relationship Journal: A Self-Guided Relationship Enhancement Program for Couples* (2014), and other resources you will find described at www.RelationshipCoachingInstitute.com (Click on Resources, then select Relationship Store from the drop-down menu.)

Because a strong, healthy marriage creates a sound family setting for raising children to become well-adjusted and responsible adults, churches can make a vital impact on society by offering marriage-strengthening programs to couples in their church and community. Practical relationship education certainly contributes effectively to our mission of “making disciples of

Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” Visit www.marriagelovepower.net for a variety of “Best Practices Articles and Recommended Resources” on topics ranging from Relationship Education, Marriage Preparation, Marriage Education and Enrichment, Parenting, Clergy Families, and ministries with those in Crisis and Transition. Or search for these documents by topic or title at <http://www.umdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/intergenerational-family-ministries>.

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