

“AS SCARCE AS HEN’S TEETH” – HOW TO FIND A MARRIAGE/RELATIONSHIP
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Oh No – not again!

Here I am sitting in the dentist’s chair - hearing his unrelaxing music interspersed with drilling noises, looking at his grey walls and his uninspiring pictures, smelling all those pervasive medical smells – with the upper part of my left jaw and face so numb I wonder whether I’ll ever feel it again, and he says: “Well we’ve drilled out the old filling and decay and it’s too deep to put in a composite enamel filling so we have no choice but to use a mercury amalgam filling!”

What do you do?? Go elsewhere?? This is the third dentist I’ve been to. I’ve already spent a lot of time and money on his examination and assessment phase. He came very highly recommended. I **did** like him before. I thought he had agreed to fill my teeth with non-mercury choices. And I am paying him top rates which I didn’t mind as I thought from all the research and questioning I’d done he was going to be “The One”!

Do I say, No thank you, full well knowing he will argue with me and convince me that his way is the only way. Do I say No thank you, and take my raw, gaping hole and go once again searching for “the mythical beast” of a dentist who is committed to mercury-free fillings and does what he says he will do?

What did I do? – In my raw and vulnerable state I said; all right fill it!! And that is me who people would know as someone who speaks out strongly for her rights!

Am I painting a vivid enough picture?

What’s she on about, you may be asking yourself – especially those of you who know me as a therapist who specializes in working with relationships! Well I wanted to paint the strongest picture I could of how difficult I know it to be (and are often told this by clients) for people to find a marriage/relationship counselor that has the knowledge, experience, tools/resources and attitude to assist you to bring transformation and healing to your relationship.

Mercury/amalgam free dentists in West Australia are like hen’s teeth! – a fun analogy there! Yet after this experience and much further research I have now finally found “The One” this time. Oh how joyful and excited I was finally finding a dentist who has been completely amalgam-free for 20 years who has “state of the art” knowledge and equipment as well as a great attitude and manner. It didn’t even matter that his practice was an hour’s drive away from me.

That long drive home gave me time to think. I got to thinking of the parallels to my work. Many people come to marriage/relationship counseling feeling similarly very vulnerable – feeling raw and numb and powerless or with such a grieving broken heart that feels like it might never fit together again or a gaping hole that feels so empty that it can never be filled. Many feel resigned and come with a sense of helplessness at finding anything that is going to make a difference. And marriage counseling traditionally has a bad reputation in many people’s memories for not offering much that works. Effective marriage counselors are also as rare as “hen’s teeth”! Often using outdated and damaging and toxic resources.

So how do you find a practitioner/professional who are up to date with their knowledge, skills and experience about what makes a marriage work? How do you know the right questions to ask? I thought I would like to offer you some guidelines as to what to look for.

This person will have the attitude that their job is to be a champion for your marriage/relationship and their focus will be to help both see how they co-create the destructive cycles and patterns of disconnection that go on between them. They know you need to be taught, and can teach you and facilitate you to do the work necessary to strengthen and deepen your love and NOT just focus on fixing your conflicts and disagreements.

They will teach you that you need to **learn to love your partner in the way they want to be loved and teach you how to do that** – learning how I need be so that my partner feels safe and cherished and adored and at the same time retaining my own sense of integrity and authenticity.

Here are some useful statements to be making when looking for a therapist:

“I want to learn how to really hear my partner and listen in a way that they feel really heard and accepted for who they are. I also want to learn how to speak in a way that they are receptive and validating of what I say.... I want to know and understand what it is like living in their world - seeing the world from their perspective. I want to learn how I contribute to the nightmare that is going on between us. I am willing to ask the question – “what’s it like living with me?” and to be receptive and gracious and grateful to hear my partners sharing of **my** frustrating qualities. These are some important areas to be checking in on.

This counselor would teach me that the key to my own growth and healing lay in the things I find frustrating in my partner and they with me. That “waiting for the perfect mate” to show up or wishing your partner to be that way was like waiting for a "knight in shining armour" to ride his white horse into your life bringing everything you needed to be happy. Not possible. Your happiness is inside you and your partner is your key to finding that happiness - and incidentally is the quickest and surest path to your own growth and healing. Especially when there is conflict! Groan!

So much of the work of being an effective partner is counter-intuitive; feeling like this is just not me. We are going to need to be doing behaviours that will feel uncomfortable and unfamiliar where we will need to stretch out of our normal comfort zones. This is being intentional and this is what change is. Says Harville Hendrix in his NY Times best selling book “*Keeping The Love You Find*”

Change “demands clear intention, sustained attention and the conscientious day-by-day practice of new skills and unfamiliar, uncomfortable behaviour.”

We are simply not going to feel like doing it and it will not be easy to do it.

Another quote of Hendrix from his first book “*Getting The Love you Want: A Guide for Couples*” that I like is:

Marriage is a psychological and spiritual journey that begins in the ecstasy of attraction, meanders through the rocky stretch of self-discovery, and culminates in the creation of an intimate, joyful, lifelong union. Whether or not you realize the full potential of this vision depends not on your ability to attract the perfect mate, but on your willingness to acquire knowledge about hidden parts of yourself.

Love is a topic that is greatly misunderstood. All relationships go through predictable stages and however glorious it may feel...the heady infatuation/romantic stage is not what love is really about. People need to learn an understanding of what is really going on and about the hidden agenda of relationships and how to decode it.

How's that for some beginning guidelines of what sort of questions and areas to check out?
We need skills and we need to learn them and to regularly update our learning.
Falling in Love is easy.....staying in Love is another matter....something that we all
need to learn.....something that can feel as hard as "pulling hen's teeth".