

How to Change Your Partner

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"Incredible change happens in your life when you decide to take control of what you do have power over instead of craving control over what you don't." — Steve Maraboli

"Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself." — Rumi

Everyone who has been married for more than a week has wanted or tried to change their spouse. But the truth is we can't change them. That is his or her job. The smartest thing we can do as loving partners is to work on our own ability to love and accept them in deeper and more authentic ways. We can only really change ourselves, but doing that of course, is the most difficult thing of all.

Couples who are successful and doing well, are not that way because they came from stable, loving homes, and it's not just because they have excellent communication skills. It's not even because they lucked out and found an especially wonderful person to marry. What gives them an edge is their attitudes towards each other.

Successful couples practice an overall feeling of generosity towards each other and make effort to develop the attitude of 'I am on your side' and 'I have your back.' They focus on building good habits, they work at keeping their difficulties in perspective, and they try really hard to be nice to each other, even when they're angry or disappointed. They give each other the benefit of the doubt and they assume the best in each other.

Cultivating this kind of attitude towards each other is actually one of the kindest things that we can do for ourselves too. It puts us in control rather than blaming our partner, and it allows us to experience the pleasure of giving to someone we love.

This doesn't mean that we take all responsibility for the state of our unions, and it doesn't mean that we do the internal work for our partners that they need to do for themselves. It just means that we intentionally choose to be kind and generous when it matters the most.

And it matters most when they're driving us crazy and we're tempted to react in decidedly unspiritual ways. When this happens, we can try to picture them hanging onto the edge of a cliff by their fingernails. Because when people are acting badly, or in ways that are upsetting to us, it is most often because they are struggling, and are temporarily unable to manage their behavior well.

If we work diligently on improving ourselves, our efforts will naturally spill over and affect our spouses and our relationships in positive ways. We can all work at developing an attitude of gratitude. We can notice and appreciate the positive traits we see in our partners. We can actively practice become more accepting, thoughtful and kind. As we get better at loving them, it will get easier for them to get better at loving us.

Marriage Mantras

1. I will assume the best in my partner.
2. I will practice acceptance instead of trying to change them.
3. I will practice generosity and kindness with my spouse.
4. I will look at myself to see what I can change.

This article is adapted from Debby's book, [Small Steps to Bigger Love](#), which is available through HSA Publications and on Amazon. It includes a study guide for small group use. Debby is also available for couple coaching and workshops and can be contacted at coachgullery@gmail.com or at debbygullery.com.