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life advice

A Marriage-Saving Tip on Making Decisions

Instead of acting on impulses and making quick decisions, take your time to think about the impact it will have on you and your marriage.

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A simple choice can make all the difference in your marriage.

You've had it. That's the sixth time this month the family car has been in the shop, neither you nor your spouse can handle it anymore. So what if it's a relatively new car, obviously you bought a lemon (and of course you've owned it beyond the darn "lemon law" period and the warranty has expired).

You decide, "That's it, I don't care what I have to do, I'm getting a new car" and you do! Immediately. Your spouse, assuming you know what you're doing, rejoices! You plunk down the initial payment, using next month's rent to do so, and drive happily for the next few weeks until it dawns on you that you way over-committed yourself. There is no way you can keep up these payments and you wish you had your lemon back.

You don't know what to do. You're frozen. You certainly don't want to do anything impulsive (look where that got you), but going on as you have is going to kill your finances; and your spouse is looking decidedly grim. You're between a rock and a hard place.

Well, maybe. It certainly may feel like that, but the truth is you're caught in the trap of looking

for "the" solution rather than looking for "a" solution, which in fact may be a series of solutions which eventually get you to your goal.

When a problem feels big and overwhelming—whether it be dealing with a too-expensive car, or the pain of a bad argument with your spouse, our tendency is to look for a big all-encompassing solution. "I'll dump the car," "I'll go live with my mom for a while." Sometimes those are indeed the best possible solutions, but often, you sacrifice all sorts of other things in the process. Dumping your lemon certainly got rid of that problem, but getting the new car brought along a whole host of new problems. Living with your mom for a while quickly gets you out of your marriage woes, but brings up all sorts of issues you hadn't sorted out (you argue with your mom too, remember?) and must now deal with.

Here's a wonderful tip that will make your life happier, and benefit your marriage enormously: Instead of acting impulsively or freezing into permanent paralysis, think first about the impact "the" solution is likely to have on other parts of your life. What will buying a new car mean, for example? Bigger car payments, let's say. That will have an unhappy impact on your pocketbook, and an even less pleasant impact on your spouse and family. What impact will bolting from the rough patch you're going through with your spouse have? An unresolved issue will only worsen with time, leading to far more dire results than a few weeks with your mom. Now, given your realization of the impact "the" solution will have, rather than running right to it, *deal first with the impact, then come to the solution.*

If you deal first with figuring out where the money will come from for your new car, for example, when you come to actually buying it, you won't be putting yourself or your marriage in financial jeopardy.

If after the last bad argument with your spouse, you give some thought to how you've been able to get through such issues in the past, and what resources in the way of counseling or other help might be available, then you may be able to use a few days out of the house to clear your head and figure out ways to make things better. You'd then let your spouse know that's why you're going, rather than simply ducking for cover at Mom's and stewing over "He done me wrong," which will only result in a swift and nasty decline to your marriage.

Too often, we come at problem solving purely by looking at the problem. If you start by looking first at the impact whatever solution you're considering will have on your life, you will make it much easier for yourself to come up with a solution that fits for you. You are also much less likely to find yourself in states of jeopardy, be those financial, physical or emotional.

Be good to yourself. Don't allow overwhelming problems to overwhelm you. Start to look for "a" solution (as in a series of solutions), not "the" solution, and watch your problems reduce to surprisingly manageable proportions.

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