

Relationship Advice: Why Your Superiority Complex May Be Killing Your Marriage (and How to Stop It)



By David M.R. Covey and Stephan M. Mardyks

You may be married on paper, but are you and your spouse really married *in spirit*? Sure, you live under the same roof, you may share a last name, your finances are intertwined, and you're (presumably) faithful to one another.

If you're like many "happily" married couples, you haven't really integrated your lives. Instead, you're operating as "married singles"—and it's because you believe your own upbringing is superior to that of your partner. Check out this [relationship advice](#):

People usually bring two different value systems into their marriage. Where do they get those values? From their upbringing, naturally. And human nature being what it is, we tend to believe that what we are taught as children is the "right" way to operate.

If you're not proactive in bridging the schism, the problems that arise from your conflicting viewpoints can kill your marriage (or any other kind of intimate relationship yours might be).

When you disagree on the small things—how to squeeze the toothpaste or arrange the furniture—it's not that big a deal. But when it comes to more substantial issues, being out of sync can lead to fighting, simmering resentment, and, ultimately, divorce.

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We call this destructive pattern the "Relationship Trap." It's actually one of seven traps covered in our book *Trap Tales: Outsmarting the 7 Hidden Obstacles to Success*. In the book, we provide new insights to help you escape the seductive modern-

age traps that keep you from reaching your optimal performance and happiness—and our solutions often cut against the cultural grain.

Trap Tales teaches readers the art of Trapology, as described through the tale of Alex, a husband and father who has unwittingly fallen into the traps that so many people struggle with. Alex fell into the Relationship Trap because he and his wife failed to discuss their differing values systems. Over the years, Alex left the brunt of the household duties to his wife and spent money on things he wanted while she worried over their increasing debt. Their story no doubt rings true for many couples facing similar problems.

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The Relationship Trap is pervasive today for various reasons. First, women can and do work and no longer have to rely on their husbands for survival. Separation and divorce today are highly common. Plus, it's easier than ever to meet new people online, so people tend not to feel “stuck” with their current partner when things get tough.

The bottom line? Couples need to negotiate their different roles to find harmony in the modern age. This begins with understanding the reasons why we fall into the Relationship Trap:

1. As mentioned earlier, we believe our upbringing is superior to that of our partner's. It's very common for each spouse to think the way things were done in their childhood is the right way to operate. Anything that runs counter to their experience is seen as different, weird, or just plain wrong. This applies to both the big things, like how they raise their kids or manage their money, and small things, like how they organize the kitchen. We make these judgments unconsciously and become annoyed at the differences in our spouse or partner.

2. We fail to shift our mindset from “me” to “we.” Most couples don't spend enough time thinking like a team in their marriage, and the ramifications are serious. If you think of marriage as a sport, too many couples today are running track instead of playing football. But to make their marriages work best, couples must focus on transitioning from me to we and thinking of their marriage as a team sport.

3. We are unwilling to change, or we agree to change only if our partner changes first. Finally, couples fall into the Relationship Trap (and get stuck there) because they wait for their spouse to change first. But change is very difficult, and most people tend to avoid it as long as they can. In relationships, this translates to a very long wait. The lack of movement in one partner makes the other partner feel justified in not changing either. But when our partner attempts to change, our conscience is pricked to reciprocate in kind. Therefore, the best way to encourage change in your partner is to change first yourself.

Here's the thing: The conventional approach to climbing out of the Relationship Trap—"agree to disagree" and focus on other areas in which you are compatible—doesn't work. This approach acknowledges that you can't change others and suggests that you just need to accept each other's differences. However, if you can't create a mutual perspective on important issues, your marriage is likely to remain superficial at best.

To solidify your relationship, you must create a shared vision for your marriage and agree upon a pathway to get there. People typically don't do this because it's easier to simply repeat what they've each seen modeled already. But if you want a strong marriage that goes beyond the superficial, you must do this.

Here are three steps for creating your shared vision for the future:

STEP 1: Plan some time to formulate your shared vision together. This step is crucial, and to complete it, you need to have time free of distractions and interruptions. Yes, it may feel uncomfortable at first, but you'll quickly see that it is fun and exciting to imagine what you can accomplish in your life together. This exercise will draw you closer as a couple.

STEP 2: Discuss and come to an agreement on these three crucial issues.

How will you manage your finances?

How will you raise your kids?

How will your household duties be divided and managed?

Write down and commit to memory your agreement with your partner.

STEP 3: When disagreements arise, try this "Trap Inversion."

If you have a major disagreement, ask each other how important the issue is on a scale of 1-10 (where 1 is not important at all and 10 is extremely important). Be honest in your assessment. Allow your partner to have their way if they score higher on the scale than you on that particular disagreement.

It's never too late to create a shared story with your partner. And the good news is that the modern world offers so many more opportunities than it ever did in the past. What couples can achieve is limitless if they just take the time to create a plan and work toward it together.

David M.R. Covey and **Stephan M. Mardyks** are widely seen as world-renowned experts in the field of global learning and development. They are the cofounders and CEOs of SMCOV, Wisdom Destinations, and TrapTales; and cofounders and managing partners at ThomasLeland, Leading in English, and Streamline Certified. Past experiences include serving as joint COOs at FranklinCovey.

Trap Tales: Outsmarting the 7 Hidden Obstacles to Success

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