

Be An Explorer--And Dare to Get Lost!

Remember last month's article, "[The Perfect Defense- Fabulous for Lawyers, Fatal for Lovers](#)"? You got to be a fly on the wall and hear Tim and Sarah argue about how much money Tim had spent on a bicycle. Sarah was doing her best to build an impeccable defense that explained why she was being perfectly reasonable while Tim was sadly mistaken. Tim was working just as hard to do the very same thing. All that hard work was getting them nowhere but angrier and angrier. Until-- they dropped their defenses and started to understand each other.

Once you drop your defense and stop arguing like a lawyer, you'll probably find that your hostilities dissolve pretty quickly. Not only that, but you can wrap up your argument the best way of all--feeling closer to each other than ever. This month I promised you ideas on how to do this.

What's the key? Think like an explorer, not a lawyer. A lawyer's job is to prove she has all the answers. An explorer knows he doesn't. What he does have is the courage to set off into unknown territory and the faith that it will be worth it because there's something wonderful on the other side. You need these qualities, too, when an argument erupts with your beloved. You have to venture into the emotional wilderness and accept the uncertainty of not knowing where you are, in order to find the intimacy on the other side.

An argument is a sure fire sign there's something new you need to learn about the landscape of your relationship. It might be something new about yourself. For example, if you "see red" when the situation doesn't warrant it, chances are your partner has stepped on an emotional 'landmine' from your past. The desire "not to go there" can be strong and the lawyer stance will keep you right where you are.

Terri had trouble understanding how much solitude her husband's writing career required. She blew up at him one Saturday for being distracted, even though she knew he had a deadline and an article that wasn't going well. Terri felt a strong pull to convince Al that she was neglected.

Instead, she dug deeper and asked herself why she got so tense when Al went "into his cave." She finally realized that it made her feel the way she did when her father disappeared into his study. She felt the same way with Al as she did when she was trying to get her father's attention. This was a turning point for their relationship. Al was able to understand something important about Terri's childhood and her inner world. Terri became more capable of supporting Al's writing. They felt much more like team.

An argument might mean you need to learn something about your partner. It will help if you can create a climate of safety, so he can go into the uncharted territory. Too often we assume that if we're not sure about what we feel or can't explain it well, it doesn't count. The truth is, that idea that popped into your head half formed is probably the most important thing you could bring up. That's where the growing edge of your relationship is. That's when you're on the verge of new understanding that will bring the two of you

closer together. So, if your partner says something that "doesn't make sense," stay with him and listen supportively. Be patient and allow him to reach his destination.

When Jack and Carol came to see me, Jack was mystified about why Carol was so unhappy. Their wedding was four months off and he thought everything was great. Carol said, "Why are you looking for a job right now? Now, of all times. It feels like you just don't care."

The temptation to argue like a lawyer was strong: "Hey, I didn't do anything wrong! Why are you getting on my case? I'm getting a better job to lay the foundation for our future."

Instead, Jack just listened to Carol until he got it. Like many women, Carol expected an engagement to be a special, romantic time of life, though it was hard for her to describe. And like many men, Jack had no idea it was supposed to be different from any other time. A half hour later, he had a much better understanding of how she felt. Not only that, she understood that his looking for a job was something he was doing for them. He was showing he cared in a completely different way.

The next time you find yourself in an argument with your partner, don't think like a lawyer-think like an explorer. Gather your courage, set off into the unknown, and get ready to learn something new. Dare to get a little lost. The intimacy you find will be well worth it.

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