

---

# Claire's Tools and Tips for Happier Relationships

---

January 2005

---

## In This Issue

-- The Laser Lifestyle

-- Your Questions

---

I feel very lucky to live in a country where work can be more than just a way to survive. Where it can nourish the mind, build self-esteem, and provide what novelist Henry James described as "the most agreeable emotion of the human heart"-success.

But a lot of us are getting too much of a good thing. When work becomes all-consuming, the rest of our lives suffer, including our sense of well-being and our relationships.

I see the price of work/home imbalance in my office every day. That's why I'm devoting three issues of this newsletter to ideas for **getting back in balance**, so you can get more enjoyment from both your family and your work.

Today, I'm looking at the problems that come up when work culture leaks into home culture, and what you can do about them.

## The Laser Lifestyle

Sometimes, it's good to be out of touch with your feelings. Yes, I did say that! Take, for example, emergencies. If you've watched a T.V. show like ER, you've seen this scene many times: A distraught relative causes havoc in the emergency room. He has to be physically removed so the doctors and nurses can do their jobs.

There's no room for feelings in the ER. Every second counts and emergency workers have learned how to keep a laser focus on the task at hand. If you've ever gotten this kind of care yourself, I don't have to tell you what an awesome skill it is. But it can also turn into an occupational hazard. Emergency workers often lose their ability to relax and reconnect with their feelings when their shift is over. **The laser focus turns into the laser lifestyle.**

The laser lifestyle is not just for emergency workers. It's an occupational hazard for a lot of high-achievers these days. Their pace is fast and their adrenaline high, at home as well as work. They don't look left or right. They work single-mindedly to check off their goals as efficiently as possible. I call this 'the drive to optimize.'

If you've adopted the laser lifestyle, chances are you've noticed a change in your marriage or primary relationship.

Relationships languish under the laser focus. They need something more like a wide-angle lens. They need you to be open to whatever comes up. **Intimacy can't be optimized. It unfolds at its own pace.**

Think of the mindset you have when you're a tourist in a foreign country. You go strolling through town; just looking around, open to following your whims. This is just what your relationship needs. **Relationships thrive on an attitude of discovery.**

When you think about it, that's what made dating so much fun. You dropped the laser focus. You looked at your date with a wide-angle lens. You were open to learning new things, having new feelings, and communicating in new ways. You discovered new parts of yourself. It was such a satisfying experience that you kept calling her back.

You still need this kind of time and so does your partner. So try out some ways to leave the laser focus at work. **For some people, it helps to have a transition ritual, like 15 minutes alone after they come home, or a short walk or run.** You might leave a couple of nights completely work free. No checking email, no going over tomorrow's schedule. And no planning or problem-solving about family issues, either. No goals at all. Just relax and tune in to whatever's going on with your partner and kids. Even a small amount of this kind of time will make you feel more in balance.

**Bonus:** A non-stop laser lifestyle eventually takes a toll on your resilience and creativity. So don't be surprised if your new wide-angle focus increases your effectiveness at work, too.

## Your Questions

*Hi Claire,*

*I think my husband and I could use some counseling, but he is not interested in coming in. Can you give me any ideas on how to get him to come? Or should I come by myself?*

*Kathy*

Hi Kathy,

A lot of people, both men and women, find themselves in your situation. While it would be ideal if you both came to counseling together, the most important thing is to take a step. I'd suggest you come in for the free half-hour appointment that I offer. He may show more interest when he sees that you have found a real live person you feel comfortable with. I've seen that happen a lot.

And if need be, start coming to counseling yourself. His view of counseling may change when he sees you making progress on your goals. I've seen that quite a bit, too.

I wish you the best with this.  
Sincerely,  
Claire

Claire Hatch Counseling & Communication  
615 Market Street, Suite C, Kirkland, WA 98033

Claire Hatch, LICSW, is a counselor who specializes in happier relationships and turning conflict into closeness. She works with clients in her Seattle area office and by phone around the world. She gives presentations on conflict solutions and making your relationship the best it can be. For more information, visit [www.clairehatch.com](http://www.clairehatch.com). Contact Claire at 425 823-2273 or [claire@clairehatch.com](mailto:claire@clairehatch.com)

**You are welcome to reproduce this article anywhere as long as you include the information above.**