
Claire's Tips and Tools for Relationships That Work

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Time for a Dream Update?

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“My wife and I need to learn to communicate,” said Tom. That’s what most people say when they call to schedule a marriage counseling appointment. And usually they’re right. Three weeks later, I told Tom and Karla: “Communication is a problem, but it’s not the main problem. The main problem is that you’ve created a life you don’t like. And now you’re blaming each other for it.”

#### Too Much of a Good Thing

Like most couples, Tom and Karla got married with big dreams on all fronts—family, home, finances. **Six years later those dreams are killing them.**

Tom is working at a demanding job at Boeing and attending MBA classes three nights a week. Karla is working part time as a manager at Nordstroms, taking care of their daughters, two and four, and overseeing a remodel. They’re also trying to buy a cabin on Whidbey Island.

They wanted financial comfort, fun with their kids, and time out on the island. What they got was exhaustion, debt, and a relationship subsisting on ‘drive by’ communication.

**Karla and Tom are suffering from too much of a good thing.** They’re on track with the dreams that are really important to them. They’re just trying to go too far too fast.

#### Outgrown Dreams

Tammy and Frank have a different problem. They’re chasing after a dream that doesn’t fit them anymore. Tammy has always wanted to stay home with her kids until they went to school.

“Childhood is short,” she used to say. “I want to savor every minute of it.”

But Tammy’s vision didn’t survive actually being a stay-at-home mom with two toddlers. She feels blindsided by boredom and she misses her sales career immensely.

“I worked years to become someone people would listen to and then I just threw it all away? What was I, crazy? I love my kids but I feel like I’m losing myself.”

#### It Must Be Your Fault

What do these two couples have in common? They both look very much like they have a communication problem. They have become avid players of ‘the blame game.’ If you

were a fly on the wall, you would hear: “You don’t care about me!” “You never help with the kids!” “You never listen to me!”

When something goes wrong, we humans have an unfortunate habit of hurtling blame at anyone who happens to be nearby. That means that spouses are at high risk of winding up in the crosshairs.

Karla, Tom, Tammy, and Frank all have their eyes on the wrong ball. **They need to stop looking at what the other person is doing to them, and start looking at their life choices.** It’s time for a dream update.

Does this sound like you? Then carve out some time to sit down together and consider these questions. (And if you can’t imagine how you’d find the time for this exercise, that’s a sure sign you really need it!)

1. What activity is most important to each of us? How much time do we spend on it?
2. What activity is least important to each of us? How much time do we spend on it?
3. Do we have time to enjoy each other? Our kids?
4. Do we have conflicting priorities requiring creative solutions?

Stop the playing the blame game and update your dreams. Put your heads together and start creating the life you really want to live. You’ll find that a lot of those communication problems clear right up

Claire Hatch, LICSW, is a licensed counselor who helps people raise self-esteem and turn conflict to connection. She works with clients in her Seattle area office and by phone around the world. Claire gives seminars on how to settle conflicts, tame stress, and balance family and work.

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