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This Is No Waiting Game

By: Daniel Gowan

A week or so back, the evening television news reported a study that showed very poor results for marriage counseling. Success of the counseling was highly dependent upon the skill of the counselor, and any improvements in the marriage as the result of counseling were only expected to last a year. Ouch.

There was another telling piece in the study, however.

It showed that most couples waited six years to seek counseling from the time they needed it.

I would submit that the success of this process would improve greatly if the relationship was treated with more care than this. Love and health in the relationship of marriage is not all about feelings. It is about action and commitment. Where is your commitment to this relationship if you can't learn how to address issues in a productive way until six years have passed?

I take no issue with the need to have a quality counselor. It is fundamental to the process, and I have some ideas for you on that. But as a society, we need to treat relationships for the precious commodity that they are. This means we must put time and effort into them, as well as protect them.

Where I work, we recommend three-year tune-ups for all married couples. And not just after the first three years. Every three years.

These can be in the forms of seminars, Marriage Encounter Weekends, counseling and specific marriage studies. Couplehood As A Spiritual Path by Harvel Hendrix is one we use.

Practice talking to each other on a regular basis. (Talking about the kids and their activities doesn't count!) This type of focus on the relationship will contribute to a healthier marriage.

Couples, I challenge you to improve yourself for the sake of the marriage. It is a principle of family systems that if one member of the marriage improves themselves, then the system itself must change.

With focused effort, this can be for the better. Do not fall into the trap of believing that if the other one would just fix this or that, "then we would be OK." That type of approach condemns the other person and the relationship. They may have issues that need to be addressed, but the place for you to begin is with yourself.

Finally, be careful whom you choose to help you with the counseling process. It may be OK to buy pizza and lawn care from a flier on the front door, but don't pick your counselor that way. Referrals from friends who have had success with a counselor are a good way to begin. Another is from your minister or rabbi.

If you are going to use them for more than a referral, however, be sure they are trained to counsel and are not going to simply beat you over the head with a Bible. Be sure your counselor is degreed, licensed and insured. And do not be afraid to consider more than the first name you get. Counselors have different personalities, just as clients do, and sometimes it is easier to work with one over another.

Scott Peck, in *The Road Less Traveled*, defines love as "the extension of ourselves for the purpose of nurturing another's spiritual growth."

Your relationship is a precious thing. It needs to be handled carefully and gently. It is worth extending yourself over.

You wouldn't wait six years to go to the dentist if you had a toothache, would you?

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