

## Working Towards a Successful Marriage

It has been estimated in North America that the average married person spends 45 to 55 hours per week working at their job. In contrast, the average time spent per week working on their marriage is 10 to 15 minutes per week. Couples, who hear this figure, protest that they spend more time than this with one another. When I ask them if this time includes working at their marriage, they look at me with puzzled expressions. I then explain to them that the work of marriage is active and consists of 3 actions:

### Engagement, Responsibility, Communication

- Engagement** - The term 'engagement' should apply after the marriage ceremony as well as before it. In other words we need to be emotionally engaged and present with our partners. This involves doing activities together that provide real contact and energy with our partners, not merely just sitting in front of the television together. Engagement means being proactive and creative in order to find ways to strengthen the relationship. For example, make dates with one another, listen kindly to one another, or give your partner a back rub. In short, be there for one another as a friend, a comfort and a helpmate.
- Responsibility** - When I have a married couple sitting in my office, the first thing that often occurs is finger pointing, with each person instructing me to, "fix my partner so that we can have a good marriage". It is always easier for us to look at how our spouse is at fault, rather than to look at our own responsibility. As a marriage counsellor I have never seen one instance where both people don't bear some degree of responsibility for the problems in a marriage. Rather than wait for 'the other one to change' I urge each person to take responsibility for his or her role and make a change. I also explain that arguments are like a dance where one step by a partner causes the other one to follow with their usual step and so on. Therefore when we change our 'step' it causes the other person to change theirs. So take responsibility and make a positive change.
- Communication**: There is an old saying that marriage is a 50-year conversation. Truly, communication is to marriage what oil is to a car, it keeps things moving. The common denominator for couples who are having marital problems is communication problems. Good communication is ongoing and consists of talking and listening on both sides. It means that a couple is able to share important information, such as each person's thoughts and feelings about topics that affect the marriage, like money, in-laws or sex. It also means personal sharing about likes, dislikes, work or friends. It is through communication that 2 people remain real and in contact with one another.



Some of you may reply, "But I don't have time to do all these things, it's impossible." It is true that today our time is limited and both partners often work long hours. Nevertheless, it is also true that people generally find time for things that are important to them. It comes down to priorities. If your marriage and family is a priority, then get down to work!

Written by Michael Greene, MA

*C.J. Brown associate Michael Greene is a psychotherapist and counsellor who works with individuals and couples.*

Do you have your own questions regarding how EAP can help with your situation?  
Call us today at **1-800-461-2292 (toll free)** or **(905) 571-2292 (Durham Region)**.  
Confidentiality is assured.