

GETTING THE LOVE YOU WANT

The Four Non-Negotiables of a Dream Relationship

Harville Hendrix, PhD, the co founder of Imago Relationship Therapy and best-selling author, shared his thoughts on the four non-negotiable elements for a dream relationship with an enthusiastic audience of more than 500 people in Vancouver on September 11, 2009.

He said we know a lot about the process of selecting a mate — why we love who we love — and now research and long clinical experience has convinced him that we need to remember KIND when it comes to behaving in our intimate relationships.

Know that you are with another person and that person is not you!! “When your partner shows up as themselves,” he said, “you’ve been telling them to go away. And that if s/he is not like you, then they are the problem.” He described the many subtle ways we push for sameness and try to get our partners to do things our way. Instead we need to get used to “otherness”.

Increase your appreciation of your Partner until you adore them and become their advocate. “We need to appreciate our partners” he said, “and move towards curiosity about how they are different from us. We need to adore them, even if we have to fake it at first!” He said that even faking adoration will start the endorphin process in our brains and make it easier for us to genuinely come to appreciate and adore our partners. Our partners need to know we are their number one advocate, always in their corner.

Never be negative — period. Negativity unleashes toxins which undermines a relationship and harms our bodies. He said he and his wife Helen LaKelly Hunt moved towards “zero negative emissions with each other cold turkey and that for the first while they didn’t have much to say to each other!” Then they found a new way of interacting that feels like an “ongoing love affair.” Asked how to deal with complaints, Harville advised us to identify the wish hidden in the complaint and ask for what we want. So, instead of complaining that “you never load the dishwasher,” we need to ask our partners for what we want: “Honey, please load the dishwasher when you finish what you’re doing.”

Dialogue always!! The core Imago process is known as the Dialogue. It aims to create a safe and equal opportunity to slow communication between partners so that they can truly hear each other and begin to understand each other’s world. Such understanding naturally leads to greater empathy and connection. Parallel monologues, on the hand, is what so many of us do with each other and only leads to compliance and depression or rebellion and anger. Imago therapists and educators are always happy to be invited to talk about Imago dialogue!