

# Problems to Solve VS Tensions to Manage

MARRIAGE IN MOTION ▶ Module 2: Conflict

2.1

MODULE 2, LESSON 1

## SUMMARY

- Couples encounter two types of problems: solvable problems and perpetual problems. Dr. Gottman's research revealed that 69% of conflict in a marriage is made up of perpetual problems.
- **Solvable problems** tend to be situational in nature and could be about sex, housework, in-laws, money, etc. Don't let solvable problems fester. Solve them when they come up and move on.
- **Perpetual problems** are typically rooted in your different styles of relating that are unchanging to the person and come back time and time again in the relationship (ex: introvert vs. extrovert). Explore what is underneath the perpetual problem. Learn as much as you can about your partner and your differences.
- **Gridlocked problems** are when you have become entrenched in your position and are unmoving. You may feel rejected, hopeless and emotionally disengaged.
- Two words to bust through gridlock...“Yes...And.” You need to work hard to find your yes. Is there even a small portion of your partner’s point of view that you can agree to or validate?

Remember:



**69%** OF  
A COUPLE'S **PROBLEMS**  
CAN'T BE SOLVED...  
THEY **MUST BE MANAGED**

Not all conflicts are created equally. In marriage you will have “problems to solve” and “tensions to manage.” Knowing the difference between the two makes ALL the difference.

*“Conflict is an opportunity  
to learn to love your partner better over time.”*

— DR. JULIE GOTTMAN

# ACTIVITIES

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## 1 TENSIONS TO MANAGE

Before we start, take a moment to think of your workplace. The people, the processes. Clearly there are people who are challenging to work with, or those things you'd like to see done differently. Both the people and the work processes are examples of tensions you need to manage.

But all problems aren't created equally. There are other kinds of problems that need to be solved. Like the customer who received a shipment of soccer balls instead of golf balls. That's a problem you can (and must) solve.

It works the same in marriage. You'll have ongoing "tensions to manage" (or, perpetual problems) and "problems to solve."

Remember, 69% of your problems are unsolvable.

**Take a quick minute to reflect — out loud, together — on the question we asked in the video.**

**Is the fact that most of your problems are unsolvable:**  Encouraging or  Discouraging



**WHY?**

*No matter what your answer is, I hope you'll be encouraged by the fact that 1/3 of your problems are solvable. Today, we're going to focus on those.*

**Now, brainstorm a list of the top 5 pain points or problems you would like to eventually tackle, and specify if you think they are a perpetual problem, or actually solvable.**

**MY TOP FIVE AREAS OF CONFLICT ARE:**

- |          |                                |    |                                 |
|----------|--------------------------------|----|---------------------------------|
| 1. _____ | <input type="radio"/> Solvable | or | <input type="radio"/> Perpetual |
| 2. _____ | <input type="radio"/> Solvable | or | <input type="radio"/> Perpetual |
| 3. _____ | <input type="radio"/> Solvable | or | <input type="radio"/> Perpetual |
| 4. _____ | <input type="radio"/> Solvable | or | <input type="radio"/> Perpetual |
| 5. _____ | <input type="radio"/> Solvable | or | <input type="radio"/> Perpetual |

*Solvable problems tend to be situational and about a specific topic. Perpetual problems tend to be about fundamental unchanging differences between the two of you, and are likely to come up over and over (e.g. spending, child discipline, communication styles, differences in sexual appetites, etc.).*

*But there are no formulas here. The point — for now — is to have a good discussion about the different kinds of conflict you experience, and to try and distinguish between perpetual and solvable issues.*

## 2 A SOLVABLE PROBLEM

From your list above, agree on one solvable problem that you both want to work through right now and write it below.

**OUR SOLVABLE PROBLEM:**

Anytime you work on a solvable problem, you first have to identify if you have any non-negotiables. If so, this should be a VERY small list because when you enter into problem solving with your partner, you want to remain open to opportunity and influence.

There will, however, be areas that are not open for negotiating because if you did, it would mean you would be compromising a core value. **In the space below, draft out your small list of non-negotiables, and list the core value associated with that item.**

**EXAMPLE:**

The solvable problem is how to spend the holiday vacation this year.

*STEP 1 — List the Non-Negotiables*

PARTNER 1:

- Attend a religious ceremony
- Buy gifts for the kids

PARTNER 2:

- Spend Holiday with Parents
- Family togetherness

... You get the idea.

### *STEP 1 — List the Non-negotiables*

**PARTNER 1: Non-negotiables**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Core Value: \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_ Core Value: \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_ Core Value: \_\_\_\_\_

**PARTNER 2: Non-negotiables**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Core Value: \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_ Core Value: \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_ Core Value: \_\_\_\_\_

## STEP 2 — Share and Discuss



Share and discuss the reasons for your non-negotiables, and try to uncover the core values beneath your reasons. You want to understand what is most important to each of you, so that you can both honor the values that are driving the non-negotiable.

Step 2 is actually KEY to this exercise. You must first seek to understand your partner's core values before you ever enter into problem solving. Your responsibility in this exercise is to **provide a safe and comfortable space** for your partner to discuss their core values that are a part of the non-negotiables.

## STEP 3 — Brainstorm

Share and discuss together ways in which you can honor each other's non-negotiables and solve your problem. List these ideas below.



## STEP 4 — Make a Decision

Decide which compromise you will try to solve this problem. The good news is that any solution you come up with is not written in stone. You can always revisit this solution and these problem solving steps to come up with a new compromise.

Remember, it is NOT a solution if you are compromising one of your core values. The goal is to honor your partner's values and seek a creative solution that meets both of your needs.

**OUR SOLUTION IS:**

### 3 ONE THING

Sustainable relationship health is about building a trusting friendship with your partner. Remember, slow and steady wins the race. Small things, often, lead to great transformation.

With that in mind...

**What is ONE THING you could do today to improve your friendship with your spouse?**



*Now go do that one thing!*



## TAKEAWAY

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**What was your #1 takeaway from this lesson? Describe any breakthrough(s):**