

MARRIAGE IN MOTION

Transcript: Module 2, Lesson 1

ZACH

Hey! Welcome to Module Two. We're so glad you're back! So how 'bout we just get right to it, yeah?

Remember how we said "marriage only works when two mature partners choose to share their lives with one another"? In this module, we'll put the emphasis on maturity. Module Two us all about conflict and conflict management so you'll need to tap into your most mature maturity and remind yourself and one another that you're in this thing forBetter.

Here's something I know: You want the same thing... a happy, fulfilling, intimately connected relationship built for the long haul.

In order to get there, we're going to go straight after your pain - the pain of conflict - in the hopes that facing it head on will allow you to feel empowered, and in motion.

LAURA

Let's start with a "truth bomb" - that's a thing I say when I want to make sure you're paying attention. :

During the course of his research, Dr. Gottman was able to distinguish between two types of problems that couples encounter: solvable problems and perpetual problems. Most people assume that their problems should be solvable -- when in fact, the majority of conflict in a marriage is made up of perpetual problems.

After years of research, Dr. Gottman discovered that nearly 70% of the conflict experienced in marriage is perpetual. And after countless hours working with couples, I can tell you -- it's true. Even the most masterful couples grapple with issues that come back over and over again, and remain unsolved 50 years later.

ZACH

Ok. I have a question. Knowing that's true, that most of your - and everyone's - problems are unsolvable. Is that encouraging or discouraging?

Press pause and think on that for a second.

For some it's a huge bummer to know that some of your relational conflict will come back again and again. But some find it encouraging to know they're not crazy. And not alone. You are not alone. Every couple on the planet is grappling with conflict.

This lesson is about the different kinds of problems that can plague a marriage. And what you can do about them. We're going to cover a lot of ground here with the immediate goal of getting you moving more efficiently through conflict. In this video, you'll learn:

1. To spot the difference between a perpetual and solvable problem.
2. What to do about your solvable problems.
3. What to do about your perpetual problems.
4. How to recognize if you're gridlocked.
5. Two words that will bust gridlock.
6. To become clear about your "next step".

One of the reasons we get so overwhelmed with conflict is we're employing strategies that, ultimately, don't work. Especially when we try to solve our unsolvable problems. It ends up being a gigantic waste of time. So the focus for today is this:

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.

LAURA

Not being able to discern the difference between solvable and unsolvable conflict can create a lot of expectations and frustration that build up over time, making matters worse. You know what I'm talking about, right?

"Truth Bomb": There are facets about you that are -- for the most part -- unchanging. For example, you will always be an introvert, or a saver by nature, or a carefree spirit that lives life spontaneously. And your partner may be an extrovert, or a spender who plans their life to the minute. These fundamental personality differences create the spice of life... but at times this spice can itch, burn and make life a bit uncomfortable.

If, however, you can wrap your head around the different kinds of problems and also your own tendencies in conflict (remember, maturity) then your skills at managing conflict will improve, with less frustration over time.

I'm gonna start with two conflict stories I just dealt with in my office. Same couple...two totally different conflicts.

This couple shares common interests and life goals but couldn't be more different in their day to day lives. So they walk in my office already in a huff from a recent exchange in the waiting room. They arrived separately after work and upon first meeting, he wanted to wrap his wife up in a hug and kiss her hello. She rebuffed his advances and told him she wasn't ready yet... she was still in her head from work, sweaty from rushing to the appointment, and frustrated with arriving a few minutes late. By the time they walked into my office, he was feeling rejected and she was feeling smothered.

The same couple also brought up a recent argument they had regarding buying a puppy for their six year old daughter. The wife felt that a puppy was an important learning tool for their daughter. The husband didn't want to take on a 15+ year commitment, especially given their current living situation in a tight townhouse in the city.

Now one of these conflicts is solvable, and the other is perpetual... can you spot the difference? Let's

dive in...

Solvable problems are actually pretty easy to spot. These are typically situational. They can be about housework, sex, in-laws. The tricky part is that what might be solvable for one couple could be perpetual for another.

Perpetual problems are more fundamental to the relationship. They're typically rooted in your different styles of relating. For example, he's an introvert. She's an extrovert. Or it could also be topical, like housework and sex, but the couple will return to them over and over. And over again.

All couples have perpetual problems, but the real problem is when those problems become gridlocked. No matter when or how or how often you discuss the issue, you end up disappointed and dissatisfied by the fact that you're not making any progress.

We'll talk about gridlock in a bit...for now, here's the secret to dealing with your problems once you define which category they're in.

With solvable problems. It's pretty simple. You solve them. I know this sounds easier said than done, but it should be a top priority for you. There is simply no reason to allow solvable problems to plague your relationship. The activity sheet for this lesson will have some good practical tips for how to get some traction with your solvable problems.

Perpetual problems are, of course, tougher to tackle. The first step, in dealing with perpetual problems, is acknowledging and allowing that they exist. Take a look at the list we provided -- are any of these problems in your relationship, and if so, see which ones may qualify as perpetual. If your issues are not on the list, add them. The point is to begin to get clear about the problems you can solve, and the ones that will likely recur.

Second, begin to get really curious about what's really underneath the perpetual issue. Honestly, it's the only thing you can do. Once you accept that the problem will not go away, get to know it. Learn as much as you can about what makes your partner tick. Maybe even have fun with it. Why do they think the way they do? What is the upside of the issue? What can you learn from his introversion? Her extroversion?

ZACH

What Laura is talking about is curiosity. It's the failure of curiosity has severe consequences....primarily gridlock. Gridlock, by definition, means that you're not moving. But besides being stuck, here are some other obvious signs.

- If you consistently feel rejected by your partner. You're gridlocked.
- If you are having the same conversation over and over without making any progress. You're gridlocked.
- If you or your partner are dug into your position. You're gridlocked.
- If there is no humor or playfulness in your conflict. You're gridlocked.
- If your issue gets worse over time. You're gridlocked.

- Eventually, all this gridlock leads to emotional disengagement where each partner feels more justified in their position and less likely to compromise.

There are two words that can help you bust the gridlock. These are very tiny, but very powerful words. They are: **Yes. And.**

Have you ever seen Improv Comedy? It's incredible. Genius occurs. Well, Improv has one fundamental rule: "Say, 'Yes. And...". It's actually no different in healthy relationships. There are a bunch of ways to kill a conversation, or to take it in an unhelpful direction.

A primary culprit of struggle is "Yes, but...". Whenever you use the word "but" you discredit and invalidate whatever came before it. (In this case, the "yes". It's basically the same as saying no. You know the feeling.. You're having a fight, and your partner agrees with you, but then... adds the 'but'. And you know what's coming.

Here's the thing: 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? Even a tiny bit? Even if you can't appreciate their position, can you validate their personality?

The thing I love about AND is that it's exactly what you sign up for when you get married: Better AND Worse. Sickness AND Health. Richer AND Poorer.

AND has integrity...it says, "I value that a lot of things are happening at once and they all have equal power and value."

The next time you have an argument, pay attention to where you're saying "no" and "but". This may sound crazy, but trust me: Practice inserting "yes" and "and" just to see what happens to the issue semantically. Try it. Practice it. See where it takes you.

LAURA

Remember that couple from my office? Their spat in the waiting room was a solvable problem. That afternoon they worked through what each of them wanted and came up with a strategy for how to decompress and connect at the end of the day.

The perpetual problem was the one with the puppy, which was just a symbol of the hopes and dreams and fears that each of them had around things like "home" and "family" and "responsibility". In both cases, the couple had to be at their best, most mature, in order to take next steps.

Now it's your turn. Download the activity sheet titled "Tensions to Manage" to begin practicing how to solve your solvable problems and how to manage the tensions. You'll get to tackle a solvable problem.. Remember that you BOTH need to decide that this is a solvable problem. If one of you disagrees... it is a perpetual problem and off the table for discussion... for now at least.

We'll get to perpetual problems later in this module. For now, know, trust, believe that you are doing amazing work. We look forward to sharing more with you. We'll see you in the next video.