



Dear Life Coach Alex, I am an avid reader of your column, and must say that I have benefitted a lot from your knowledge in life matters. While I am not dealing with any marital issue per se, I would like to know, based on your vast experience, what couples should focus on in the different stages of their marriage.

Dear Reader, thank you very much for asking this question. I also appreciate your encouragement and obvious desire to continuously energize your marriage. Let me just say this: **If you are not growing in the knowledge of what you claim to matter most in your life, like your marriage, parenting, relationships and spirituality, then sooner or later, they won't really matter at all.** In other words, married couples who wish to consistently grow in their marriage should consistently be reading and discussing marriage books, way more than any other extracurricular activity.

Great marriage books to read and discuss with your spouse are *Friends & Lovers* by Sam and Geri Laing, *Love & Respect* by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs and *Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman.

Now, as to what you should generally focus on in different stages of your marriage: If your marriage is under 5 years old, your primary focus should be how to effectively communicate with each other. If between 3 and 10 years, your primary focus should be to grow in key areas of life. And if between 7 and 15 years, your primary focus should be to remain attractive to one another physically, sexually, intellectually, relationally and spiritually.

At **The Exhortation Institute of Life and Business**, we have a program called "The 5 Stages of Marital Focus", which outlines what you should focus on in the different stages of your marriage. But we will only be sharing the first 3 stages through this medium, while the last 2 stages, for those whose marriages are between 13 and 25, and 25 and above, would be emailed to you upon request:

Stage One – Communication (1 to 5 Years):

In our life researches, we discovered that communication is the most critical success factor in every relationship, especially in marriage. During courtship, couples fully understand each other. They know what each other want and waste no time in providing it – even without verbally communicating it to each another; although, this is obviously due to being infatuated with one another than being in love with one another.

But after marriage, couples begin to see traits and habits that were hard to see during infatuation, especially the detrimental or irritating behaviours of one another. And it could take up to 5 years of focused effort, unabashed determination, and fervent prayers to break this barrier. In fact, a good part of the 60% of marriages that now end up in divorce is mainly due to lack of effective communication. This is why communication should be the first thing to focus on in the early stages of marriage. If communication breaks down completely in your marriage, your marriage will break up.

So, how effectively do you and your spouse communicate with each other? Whether your marriage is more than 5 years old or not, how often do you get to maintain strongly opposing views and yet not raise your voices or keep malice with each other afterwards? If you rate each other below 6, on a scale of 1 to 10, you should contact us right away. If between 6 and 8, then work harder to avoid falling below 8, otherwise the pursuit of every other personal and even business objective may be negatively impacted. **Inasmuch as some people selfishly and stubbornly choose not to listen, it is often our communication process that failed when people misunderstands us.**

Stage Two – Growth (3 to 10 Years):

Between 3 and 10 years of marriage is often the most difficult period in marriages, which is why the focus should be to grow in key areas of life. This is the time to work harder at improving your personality, discarding your upbringing baggage, advancing your career without impacting family time, managing your finances to avoid stress, building beneficial relationships and trusted circle of friends, and joining spiritual support groups.

Often in marriages, it is either that one partner is continuously growing while the other is making no or way less effort, or both partners are making no effort to grow at all. This is very sad, especially since it is the main reason for the high rate of divorce in our societies today. So, which of these two categories do you fall in? Whether married or not, we should always make every effort to grow. **Your goal, if married, should be to consistently wow and motivate your spouse by your own continual growth, by your remarkable desire to gradually take yourself and family to greater heights.**

Growth in marriage is more than just learning to communicate effectively with each other; it includes growth in your leadership, parenting, spirituality, relationships, health and wellness, academics, career, finances and business. So, are you growing proportionally in these key areas of life? If you really want to know the truth, ask your spouse.

Stage Three – Attractiveness (7 to 15 Years):

Before marriage and in the early stages of marriage, couples are very attracted to each other. In fact, most marriages, unfortunately, are based on attractiveness alone. But you see, in the words of Apostle Peter, “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight”.

After about 8 to 10 years of marriage, attractiveness becomes an issue; although, communication challenges and lack of individual growth may have killed mutual attractiveness in a marriage way before then. The blessings of children often tell on the wife’s physique while the growing responsibilities will tell on the man’s time. After about 8 years of marriage, stress begins to tamper with our mental state and if you do not focus on remaining attracted to one another, you will grow apart.

Although a completely a selfish, diabolic and unjustifiable act, the lack of attractiveness in a marriage is often the main cause of adultery. A husband or wife feels that his or her partner is making no effort to be/remain attractive in the areas of marriage that is most important to him or her, and therefore stupidly start allowing someone else to become attractive. If your husband admires intelligence in women, then why are you not bent on improving yourself intellectually? If your wife values physical touch, what else could you be doing with your hands that is more important? Make consistent effort to be consistently attracted to your spouse or someone else will.

So, how attractive do you think you are to your spouse? How attractive do you find your spouse? If your answer is less than 5 on a scale of 1 to 10, contact us immediately. **Attractiveness in a marriage may be broken down into 5 categories: Physical, Sexual, Intellectual, Relational and Spiritual; your challenge is to maintain an effective balance.** If you and your spouse desires, we will gladly put both of you through one of our marital programs that is designed to help you determine your true levels of attractiveness in these areas. It will also help you to develop action items that would help both of you to consistently maintain a level of 8 and above over 10 attractiveness to one another.

Conclusion

In conclusion, if you wish to spend the rest of your life together, “to have and to hold, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until death do you part”, then never cease to maintain marital focus in these areas – regardless of your years of marriage.

It is always imperative to be consistently dressed in ways that attract your spouse, to maintain a body weight that makes him or her want to cuddle you day and night, to pursue intelligence in the areas that would enhance your interactions, to share your knowledge respectfully, to refrain from interrupting each other when talking, to listen attentively, wine and dine together, make love consistently, caress each other selflessly, play and pray together everyday and worship God as one.



Alex Nosa Ihama is a Life, Business and Executive Coach, who has been facilitating Marriage, Parenting, Career and Leadership workshops and seminars for years. Either face-to-face, or through the phone and email, he has personally coached hundreds of people worldwide and thousands more through his website, www.TheExhortation.com. This is in addition to his countless motivating and inspirational articles and newsletters that are now received in over 80 countries.

If you require life or business coaching, or would like this message delivered in the form of a keynote, workshop and seminar at your workplace, church, organization and community events, or simply wish to share your much-appreciated feedback and questions with him, send an email to alex.ihama@TheExhortation.com or call +1 (416) 902-6672.

While all questions will be responded to by the Life Coach, yours may be the next topic for Our Life Coaching Corner!