

why couples argue

Are Your Relationship Gears Clashing?

By Susan Ford Collins and Richard Israel

Upsets, as well as happiness and satisfaction, are sourced in something very few people understand...the three Gears of Relationship!

Romances start off in 1st Gear...You slowly get to know each other, spend hours and hours learning what you both like and don't like, want and don't want so that hopefully you'll be liked or even loved. The beginning of relationships is scary. You don't know The Rules yet... his or her rights and wrongs, goods and bads, have tos and musts, always and nevers, preferences and dreams. Most couples look back nostalgically to 1st Gear..."Honey, do you remember when we first met, when we talked half the night and spent all our free time together." And they keep pictures of their precious start-up memories.

Once you've mastered each other's Rules and found commonalities, things speed up. You've been obsessed with each other for weeks or even months. Your friends have started calling to see if you've fallen off the planet or moved out of town.

You're so much alike now. But as you shift into 2nd Gear (move in together or marry) differences show up. It's time to de-focus and re-focus on the rest of your lives. You straighten

your homes, reconnect with your friends, catch up on your workload and finally finish that now-dusty sales proposal or mid-year review. (It's a good thing relationships don't stay in 1st Gear. We'd never get anything else done!) Projects, deadlines, promotions, appraisals, bonuses. More-better-faster and more-better-faster still. Productive, competitive, working longer and harder to establish a home, afford a wedding, children, fund IRAs or 401Ks, buy stocks and put away money for college and retirement. Whew, we're accomplishing so much together!

But you're more and more alone...living in different worlds, roommates passing in the night, picking up kids from daycare and school, babysitting so you can go to meetings or take clients to dinner separately. You're moving further and further apart now with little in common anymore...except your marriage, your kids and your home.

Crisis point? Choice? Do you love each other anymore? Should you stay together or get divorced and remarry someone with whom you'll have more in common? (Ironic, isn't it... since all relationships go through these same three gears. You start again with someone else and then sooner and later end up in high 2nd Gear in that relationship, too.)

The key question at this point is...what do you do? Do you move into anger and disappointment and stay? Or get divorced and start over? Or shift into 3rd Gear and get creative together.

"Honey, we love each other. What can we do to re-create our relationship? To make time to talk for hours again, to get to know each other again, to plan and dream again...a new home, a new child, a new venture or trip?"

Oversimplified, yes, but nevertheless true. Let's look at an overview of the gears:

- 1st Gear is learning and starting slowly.
- 2nd Gear is doing more-better-faster, accelerating into productivity and competition.
- 3rd Gear is being outcome-oriented, dreaming, creating, innovating...re-NEWing.

Yes, sometimes you'll both be in the same gear at the same time...learning together, producing together or creating together. Sometimes you won't be, and there will be Mis-Gear-Matches, better known as Upsets. For instance, you've just gotten your child to sleep and slowed your energy to a quiet stop. Your husband rushes in (still in 2nd Gear from his work or workout) and your gears clash... there's an Upset.

Gearing Down


Gearing down and slowing down is harder than ever today. It requires high intention and tremendous caring in the face of the pressure Corporate America puts on you. It demands that you push longer and harder, produce more quantity and quality in less time, too rev up and stay revved up in 2nd Gear.

Painful upsets occur when you're all revved up and you walk through your front door and your spouse is waiting for you to teach her how to use a new cell phone (she knows you already know how to use) and you're in too much of a hurry to slow down and help her. Screeching metal grinding...there's an Upset.

No, you can't always match gears. But to avoid disappointments and arguments, it's important to sensitively acknowledge that you can't. And arrange a time later when you can. "Honey, I know you want me to slow down now and teach you. I know you asked me yesterday and I was busy then, too. But I promise I'll make time to show you when I get home." Then be sure to slow down, gear down and teach her step by step. Keep your promise...or that upset will get worse.

It's essential for you to not only recognize which gear you're in, but which gear people you're working with are in, too. Here's an example: you're rushing to close a sale but fail to build rapport and explain your product in enough detail and you lose the sale. Or you hire a new employee but you don't make time up front to teach her your Rules...the specifics of the job the way you want it done. And you're dissatisfied.

Upsets between you and your spouse and kids frequently occur when you're in 2nd Gear and your kids are in first. They need you to slow down and listen to the upset that six-year-old Sally had with a friend who snubbed her on the playground or your three-year-old Tom's frustration over not being able to fit his puzzle pieces together. Don't wait for your kids to change gears. The responsibility for shifting up or down is always with the adult. That's what makes parenting even more challenging than marriage.

Now that you know more about the three Gears of Relationship, go out there and shift them at the right time so you will both be able to have more romance, enjoy more balance in your life and have fun! 

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bidding war for a six-figure, international deal.
Rhonda is currently the Life Coach on the NBC
syndicated daytime show *Starting Over*.

Linda Sivertsen—award-winning author, ghostwriter, and magazine editor—has been featured on CNN, *Leeza*, *Extra*, *E!*, and in the *Star* & the *New York Post*. Her latest book, *The Will to Survive*, hits stores this fall.

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