

Week 18

Five Fights That Everyone Has

Fight #1

The big mistake in Fight #1 is starting off wrong. After 3 minutes (just 180 seconds), the tone and trajectory of the fight have been set. The chances that we can turn things around after a “harsh start-up” are slim to none. Starting conflict in a negative way all but assures that it will not end well.

Remember, the outcome of conflict is based on the ratio of positive interactions to negative interactions (ideally, 5 to 1 or better). Moments of positivity in mid-fight, though, cannot make up for a rough start.

Research has demonstrated that 96% of the time, how the fight proceeds over the first three minutes determines not only the trajectory of that particular fight but also predicts the success of the marriage over the next 6 years. The data is clear. If you start negative, it is extremely difficult to turn it around. Furthermore, the ripple effects of a harsh start-up don't stop when the fight ends. The damage extends far into the future. Couples who start fights harshly were much more likely to be divorced 6 years later.

In other words, in a scientific setting, we could stop an argument after the first 3 minutes, and tell the couple whether they would be happy and together in 6 years or divorced in 6 years. In 90% of the cases, we'd be right!

The good news is that these predictions are not prophetic. The reason? Behaviors can be changed.

Come back next week as we begin to learn how.