

The Boardroom Technique

The purpose of this article is to provide a way for couples to review the “Boardroom Technique” they were taught during counseling. If you have not scheduled an appointment with me the information may still be helpful, but without a great deal more discussion, it will not be very effective for you, if at all.

There are four stages to having a board meeting and one important tool that needs to be used should things start to break down.

Here you go:

I usually ask that each partner hold at least one boardroom meeting between the first and second counseling sessions. These should be held on *different nights*. I suggest each of you select one of your “minefield issues,” but make sure to pick an issue that is not that-big-a-deal for you at first.

Some couples tell me they cannot think of any “firecrackers.” That all their issues are big. Of course, you can select any issue you want, but if you are not good at using assertive communication and you are already angry about the issue you are going to present, expect the process to be more difficult. If things don’t go well at first it is easy to get discouraged and stop practicing.

Do yourself a favor and find an issue that is small for you. Quickly you will find yourself using the principles any time you are communicating with each other, whether the issue is big or small.

Here are the basic steps:

1. First person speaks for up to ten minutes (you don’t have to use the entire 10 minutes)
2. Second person listens closely to the first person’s issue
3. Second person speaks for up to ten minutes (on the same issue)
4. First person listens closely
5. If things start to go poorly “take a break” until both of you can talk assertively about the issue again.

Here are the rules to follow for each step:

1. When either of you are taking your ten-minute opportunity to speak, you will talk about your “mine field issue” by stating only how the issue affects you, and what you would like to see done about it and why. Avoid aggressive communication behaviors like telling the other person they need to change, or they are doing this or that wrong. This ten-

minute section is for you to simply explain your perspective on the issue you have brought up. You should not be trying to convince your partner of anything. At this stage you want to be clear about the issue, how it affects you and how you would like to see it resolved. You must be equally interested in knowing and understanding your partners position.

2. The person who is listening first will avoid judgment of what the first person is saying or forming an opinion about what is being said. You are only listening to understand what is being said by your partner; to make sure you fully understand them. When your partner is done talking you will say: "Okay, what I heard you say was..." Always remember if you don't ask your partner whether or not you heard them right, you are hearing what you would mean if you said what they did. Not asking can make things go downhill quickly. You still haven't heard your partner.

Remember: "What I heard you say was..." = Magic Words. Make them a part of your regular speech.

Quick refresher on how to "take a break."

Remember, if you start to argue, you might as well stop talking about the issue for a while. You will never really solve an issue by arguing about it; by becoming aggressive, passive, or passive-aggressive.

As soon as either one of you feel your anxiety building say: "Okay, I need to take a break." When you say this though you have to follow it up with stating when you will come back and finish the conversation.

Never leave the conversation without saying when you will come back and continue. Doing so causes your partner to feel you are abandoning them and they will want to keep you from leaving, causing a poor outcome to the board meeting.