

## Chapter 4

# Are Your Visions for the Future Aligned?

### When Visions Differ



Most people don't fight because they enjoy the tension, negative feelings, or instability it brings. Rather, they fight to attain their vision of peace that differs from someone else's. They experience conflict trying to

substitute or maintain their desired reality over an alternative option, regardless of the impact on the other party.

One man, whose father was a raging alcoholic, recalled, "If anything disturbed my dad's world, he responded with blind fury."

Consider the case of Jack and Emily (not their real names). Jack's dream had always been to be a father. Emily's vision for her life, however, did not include children. Becoming a mother would require that she give up her aspirations. This was truly a situation where one spouse's dream was the other's nightmare. The pair talked about their differences. They argued over their differences. But try as they

might, they could find no middle ground. To endlessly argue over the matter was pointless. They divorced.

Ironically, those who fight guide themselves with their own vision of peace.

## The Power of Having a Common Vision



Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues conducted what is now seen as a classic social experiment. He took 22 eleven-year-

old boys who attended a three-week sleep-away summer camp and divided them into two groups.

During **stage one**, each group of boys, unaware of the other's existence, had an opportunity to build positive relationships.

During **stage two**, the counselors brought the two groups into contact with each other in such a way as to foster competition, antagonism, and conflict between the two groups of boys. Each group's members unified in their dislike for the other group and engaged in acts of hostility (e.g., name-calling, burning of the other group's flag, raiding and ransacking the other's cabin, stealing items, and even

fighting). Counselors (experimenters) had to intervene on more than one occasion.

During **stage three**, the experimenters made various attempts to reduce the conflict and build harmonious relations between the two groups. Initially, nothing worked, which worried the experimenters as the end of the three weeks was approaching.

**Finally**, Sherif and his team introduced “superordinate goals.” These are goals that enable people from opposing sides to come together to achieve outcomes that are more important to each side than the differences that divide them.

At the camp, various problems suddenly appeared. These were problems that one group alone could not resolve but only by both working together.

The impact of each successful joint venture built goodwill. As the successes piled up, changes in the way the two groups interacted improved dramatically. *The boys from the two groups became friends.*

Sherif concluded that when the boys encountered shared problems, they were motivated to find a solution together. They achieved that which they “**jointly envisaged.**” [bold added]

## Relevance for Marriage

The above account is not very different from what a percentage of couples do all the time. They stay together, not necessarily because it is what one or both want. They do it “for the sake of the kids,” imagining what is best for them.



The lesson to be gleaned is that if people, and particularly couples, are going to stop battling one another, they must have or create a common vision and goal that unites them.

Do the two of you experience the same disagreements over and over again?

Could it be that your opposing positions are due, not to the immediate issue at hand, but to a much larger difference?

Could your tensions result from the fact that you have not taken the time to know and understand the dreams of your spouse?

Watch this brief video on discovering what your spouse’s dreams are.



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G\\_Vz\\_Cbsu3o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_Vz_Cbsu3o)



## Exercise

### **From Disagreement to Your Spouse's Inner World**

This exercise starts with choosing a reoccurring disagreement. The idea is then to work your way back to any underpinning beliefs that may be contributing to the argument.

One of you will ask the other all five of the following questions. Reverse roles when done.

1. How does this specific dispute relate to your larger picture of what you think life should look like?

2. Are there any beliefs, principles, or values at play here for you that your spouse is unaware of or is not in agreement with?

3. Does this issue relate to your childhood, background, or experience? In other words, is there another story behind your perspective?

4. Why is the outcome of this matter so important to you?

5. Why is this issue so emotional for you?

**To the listening spouse:** Respectfully summarize what your spouse shared with you.

**To the speaking spouse:** If your spouse's summary of your answers is incomplete or not completely accurate, explain that part again.

**Goal:** The goal of this exercise is to help each of you gain insight into the hopes and dreams of the other. Even if you go no further, simply understanding where your spouse is coming from can reduce the intensity of your disputes. It may make resolving your specific disputes or living with your differences easier to do.

## **B. Develop a Positive, Unified Vision**

### **Step 1**

Discuss your hopes, aspirations, and vision for your future as a couple. Ask each other, "What would our future look like we could create it any way we wanted?" Try to capture what you agree upon in one all-encompassing sentence. For example, a traditional wedding vow reads:

*I, \_\_\_\_\_, take you, \_\_\_\_\_, to be my (wife/husband), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, and in sickness and in health. I will love and honor you all the days of my life until death do us part."*

Use the above vow as a "big picture," jumping off point to discuss and what this might specifically look like for your marriage.

For example, “We will make each other a priority over other relationships, enjoy each other through adventure and intimacy, bear with each other’s weaknesses, and forgive each other for the sake of our family.” Create an overarching vision to guide you each day.

## Step 2

Once you agree on your overall vision, work separately to create a list of ways to attain your vision. For example,

*We will have open discussions to reach consensus on important decisions that affect our family.*

*We will not argue in front of the kids.*

Make sure all your statements are in the positive. Don’t say, “You will stop bossing me around.” Rather, “You will treat me as an equal.”

## Step 3

- a. Create an agreed upon combined list.
- b. Each week or month, go over the list to see if you are on track to fulfill your vision. Feel to make changes or additions if circumstances warrant it.
- c. Use this time to reaffirm your love and commitment to each other.

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