

Though it takes two hands to clap...I can be 100% responsible

I have tested this statement many times. I ask an audience, "Whenever someone says, 'It takes two hands to clap...' what does it mean in terms of percentage sharing?" They would inevitably answer, "50% - 50%", meaning that each of them will take 50% of the responsibility. While it sounds logical and fair, this does not work in marriage!

When one partner is only willing to take 50% of the responsibility, it seems to mean that if the other person is not willing to take 50% of the responsibility as well, then the problem cannot be solved and the relationship is "stuck". Hence this arrangement will not work for any marriage relationship because a relationship cannot grow when many issues are swept under the carpet. So what does it mean when I say "Though it takes two hands to clap...I can be 100% responsible"? Two points:

- 1) Though it may not be my fault, I can be responsible for the interactions between my spouse and me. The question I always ask is "Before your spouse reacted negatively, who was the last person to speak to him/her?" The obvious answer is "me". So if I was part of the interaction, I can take responsibility for the direction and outcome of the conversation!
- 2) Though it may not be my fault, I can take the initiative to talk about the issue. Sometimes one may wait for their spouse to take the initiative to talk about an issue because he/she was the one who did something wrong and thus seemed to be the one at fault. You may ask, "Why should I initiate?" Well, no one wins in a marriage when each waits for the other person to initiate a conversation. So to be responsible would mean to initiate and talk about the issue instead of waiting for each other to do so.

Let's use an example to illustrate: A husband came back home from work and went to kitchen. He asked his wife, "Hi dear, what's for dinner tonight?" His wife responded unhappily, "Why are you only concerned with what's for dinner, can't you see I am busy preparing the food? Can you first help to take care of the kids? Can't you see they are fighting again?" The husband may then scratch his head and wonder, "What did I do wrong? I asked nicely so why would she need to react to me in this manner?" In this example, the husband might not quarrel back but would feel very unhappy over how the wife had reacted. He could remain quiet the whole night because he feels that his wife should apologise to him, or he could try to tell himself that "It's ok lah. Women are like this..." and brush it off as if nothing had happened. But over time, this solution may not be emotionally healthy for the husband! The principle here is that even though it may appear that the wife seemed to be at fault, the husband can be 100% responsible by acknowledging his part in the interaction, and taking the initiative to talk to his wife about how he felt, so that his wife could also share about why she had reacted the way she did. After the chat, the couple may find out that they each had their own inaccurate perceptions of the conversation and this caused the misunderstanding! Or even if they truly had an accurate perception, they could talk about how to prevent the situation from happening the next time!

The 100% responsibility principle in a marriage does not guarantee that all problems can be solved immediately, but it does prevent couple from getting "stuck" in their own stance, sweeping the dust

under the carpet or allowing the “cold war” to build up until either of them explodes! So be responsible and take action!

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