

3 Subtle Attacks Against Modern Marriages

In 1987 I was a new Navy wife—straight from the land of Oz. And I didn't know the first thing about the Navy lifestyle; no warships existed in Kansas! So, when I moved to California and met and later married my husband, Ray, I became a member of the larger military family, and Uncle Sam became my father-in-law. Thanks to my friend, Vernel, a Navy wife I met at my new job upon arriving in California, she offered a quick lesson one Saturday afternoon in Navy life 101.

I learned to expect occasional squalls between my husband and I brought on by rotational deployments with following seas of emotional anxieties. I realized there would be repeated adjustments, unique challenges unlike traditional marriage, intermittent miscommunication, with large doses of trust a certain requirement. On the up side, moments of well-deserved joy at homecomings would be the pinnacle of pride and honor in our beloved military member, all to say this lifestyle is worth it. Either way, I embraced my new role as a supportive Navy wife, determined not to throw up the white surrender flag when the stormy seas crashed in.

Marriage is hard in the 21st century, but a military marriage is not for those with one-sided expectations or a casual commitment. Like a warship undergoing sea trials to test the limits of the workings and maneuverability to determine its seaworthiness, there are also difficult hardships inherent in a military marriage to show whether or not your own marriage is seaworthy. Three of the top concerns for today's military marriages are outlined below.

Selfishness. Last year while driving to work one morning I heard that selfishness is the number one destroyer of relationships. John Paul II said, "The great danger for family

life, in the midst of any society whose idols are pleasure, comfort and independence, lies in the fact that people close their hearts and become selfish.” In any marriage, selfishness is a deterrent to a lasting relationship, but in a military marriage, its tolerance is short-lived, potentially sinking your marriage soon after it departs the pier. Other than infidelity, selfishness left unaddressed is the fastest channel to sabotaging your marriage, deeming it unworthy for a sea-faring relationship.

There is a new viewpoint out there in our marital culture. Dr. Brad Wilcox, the director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, has written about this new perspective of marriage and its enemy, selfishness. “In the new psychological approach to marriage, one’s primary obligation was not to one’s family but to one’s self; hence, marital success was defined not by successfully meeting obligations to one’s spouse and children but by a strong sense of subjective happiness in marriage—usually to be found in and through an intense, emotional relationship with one’s spouse.”¹

This new view, contrary to the Christian belief of marital love, which highlights Christ’s love for the church, involves freely giving of one’s self to his or her spouse, is short on roots of generosity but deep in self-serving motives and entitlement. One way to stop or prevent selfishness is to focus on spiritual readiness. Instead of asking, “what will make *me* happy and fulfilled in *my* military marriage?” ask, “what will make *us* blessed and fulfilled in *our* military marriage?”

Unwarranted Expectations. Like selfishness, having idealistic expectations will send tempests into your marriage. Young military marriages in particular will benefit from recognizing that your military spouse has a job unlike most civilian jobs. Even on shore duty, he or she can’t be expected to always be available for wedding anniversaries, children’s birthdays or

even funerals for in-laws. Although the military understands the importance and value of these milestones and events, they can't appease every request, nor can they be expected to. They must continually balance the needs of the military with military morale and sensitivity to family. I recall halfway into my husband's military career, he was underway three consecutive wedding anniversaries. I was disappointed, but when I reflect back, was there really anything he could do about it? Try the following to increase the sea-worthiness of your military marriage:

- Focus on the purpose and value of faith and discuss together whether or not your expectations are warranted and fit the example of faith Christ modeled.
- Resist the urge to punish your spouse for what he or she can't change or control.
- Refuse the impulse to blame your spouse for being in the military.
- Comparing your military marriage and family's rhythm and schedule to that of civilian marriages only creates discontentment and plants negative thought patterns that the military lifestyle isn't honorable service. Even in the civilian sector, there are unattractive job requirements.

Albert Einstein once said, "There are two ways to live; you can live as if nothing is a miracle; you can live as if everything is a miracle."

Deception and Distrust. These two undesirable traits are linked. If there's deception, distrust soon follows. In a military marriage, getting to the first base of trust between you and your spouse is a must. Trust is a raw material that has to be cultivated. Trust is the cornerstone of marriage. It

is what binds and links the other walls—unconditional love, commitment, transparency, communication and honesty together.

Conflict is inevitable in marriage. And our jobs as marriage partners is to navigate through trust issues, with sound resolutions, not around them, believing they will fade away on their own. Otherwise, the same storm returns over and over again, threatening to shipwreck your marriage.

For trust issues related to infidelity, a couple can't go wrong with biblical counseling. It may be a needed first step. Doing so will take hard work. There are no easy fixes, but if you're committed it can lead to necessary discovery and growth. Pastor Chip Ingram, author, and radio host of *Living on the Edge* said about marriage, "conflict is an opportunity to grow." Other ways to build trust are:

- Be transparent—While on deployment or even short underway periods, be emotionally responsible with your spouse to maintain trust. Share your day, the good and the bad. If you're the spouse at home, tell your husband or wife what you did that day or week, where you went, people you met with, the money you spent, the bills you paid as well as those you forgot to pay. If you're the spouse underway, do the same. If on a port call, share the places you went to, venture out in groups with the same sex, how much money you spent, and interesting events you encountered.
- Forget being right or wrong. We've all been there, but there comes a time when this mindset has to end if what is truly wanted is a healthy and working marriage. Strive for solutions that steer you in the direction of unity.
- Reconfirm your commitment to your spouse throughout the

deployment. Think of ways that honestly convey emotional trust. Start with “I appreciate that you _____ (fill in the blank).”

When failure happens, don't give up. If trust was breached, it's normal to feel hurt and want to shut the offending spouse out. However, if you're willing, let your spouse know he or she can earn your trust back, but genuine changes that bear results must happen. Put accountability steps in play.

Lisa Nixon Phillips is a retired Navy wife, mother, author and business owner with her husband, Ray. In 1986, she left Kansas and started a new life in California where she met and married her husband of 27 years. A passionate supporter of her husband's military service, Phillips volunteered for various military family events during the span of his 21 years of service. While stationed on the island of Guam, she served as an Ombudsman to the Navy's ship repair facility.

Like every military family, Phillips and her husband experienced difficult times during training missions, deployments and PCS moves, but she attributes her resiliency as a military wife to her faith. She and her husband currently reside with their two pugs in Arlington, Washington.