



They say that when a man marries a woman, he thinks, “She’s the one I’ve been waiting for. She’ll never change.” – and she always does. And a woman looks at her man, and thinks, “He just needs a little work; after we’re married, I’ll help him change” – and he never does.

The truth is that both men and women will change as time goes on. Biologists tell us that every seven years we have totally replaced all the cells in our bodies with new ones. Our ideas, politics, interests have evolved over the years. While research shows that personality tendencies (like introversion/extroversion) remain fairly constant throughout our adult lives, we still do change. Personal change and growth can become issues in marriage because we develop at different rates. We hope our spouses will change for the better: become more patient; stop unhealthy habits; spend more time with the family; work less – or more; go to church more – or less, talk more – or less. We are all works in progress.

Change sometimes doesn’t happen fast enough to suit us. Your beloved may be oblivious to your dissatisfaction. If he or she doesn’t realize the need to change something, a loving spouse can gently ask for change. Nagging, cajoling, and arguing, however, get us nowhere and can make us even more miserable. Successful couples recognize that the only person you can change is yourself.

Enlist your spouse as your partner in self-change. When you are willing to change some behavior, tell your spouses about your plan to change and enlist their support. Energy for marital growth can be ignited in your marriages. Our spouses, no matter what personal faults or issues they may have, will appreciate our efforts (they’ve been hoping we would!).

What if your self-change strategy doesn’t light a fire under your spouse? Despite your hopes and personal improvement efforts, he or she is resistant or unable to change. This is where the most powerful – and paradoxical – tool of marital change is at your service: Acceptance. When spouses show each other love and acceptance they respond more quickly to each other’s changes.

Be ready to support any effort your spouse makes towards change, no matter how

tentative or incomplete that effort is. If he or she discloses a desire to change, be ready to help and not hinder the process. It may be that professional help is in order, but your role as helpmate is indispensable. You are the one who loves your spouse the most.