

# What Do You Mean, “Re-Evaluate”?

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Recently a couple asked us what we meant exactly, when we talked about re-evaluation after our weekend. Our first reaction was "Didn't these guys listen to the Saturday afternoon and evening talks on their weekend?" But as we thought about it for a while, we knew that it didn't matter if they listened or not. There was so much going on between them that day that they couldn't possibly remember individual concepts. We didn't. It was only after our weekend that we began to grasp the importance and meaning of many of the concepts we heard on the weekend. Most of this came to us through our community meetings and sitting around kitchen tables talking about relationship with couples until the wee hours of the morning. This is one of the reasons we are such strong advocates of couples meeting in regularly scheduled community meetings. It has been 15 years since our weekend and we still meet with a group of crazy lovers every other Friday night. But that is another story... the topic today is re-evaluation.

Generally speaking when we talk of re-evaluation we are talking about the process of looking at all of the things and activities in our lives and determining if they are really the best thing for us. Now maybe we are a bit presumptuous by referring to the process as re-evaluation. Re-evaluation implies that we evaluated all of these things and activities as to their value to us when they first came into our lives, but that is not necessarily true. Many of the things that were keeping us apart when we went on our weekend were not things that we had consciously decided on. Many of them just sort of came into our lives and never left. Some of them were carryovers from our single days, some of them came with parenthood, and some came from the workplace.

On our weekend we were given the best communication tool we have ever seen for married couples. This tool, dialogue, opened up a whole new set of possibilities for us. But mostly it allowed us to find a place where we could really talk about what was going on inside of us. It gave us the ability to create a new environment in our home. An environment that was characterized by intimacy, respect, and selflessness. We could take charge of our lives in away we never had before. We could, based on our new level of closeness, begin to define exactly what we wanted our marriage to be. We could decide how we were going to treat each other and how we were going to spend our time. On the weekend they refer to this as re-evaluation but probably for many of us it is the first time we have made these kinds of changes in our lives. It is the first time in a long time that many of us have been able to sit down and talk to each other openly.

For us this came slowly. We had dialogued for over a year before we began to really recognize and acknowledge how destructive our lifestyle was to our hopes and dreams. Now we know those sound like harsh and dramatic words but let us explain. Take our finances, for example, this was a constant area of irritation for us. We were nearly over-extended and any unexpected expense could cause trouble and usually a fight. We often dialogued on this area. Our feelings were usually pretty gloomy. Words like frustrated, trapped, angry, and depressed seemed to best describe our feelings.

Somewhere along the line some good friends of ours remarked after a sharing one night they sure wished we would do something about our money so we wouldn't always be so gloomy about this area of our lives. Our first reaction was anger. Who were they to tell us what we should do about our money? But after some reflection, we realized they were absolutely right. We were the only ones who could do something about the situation and until we made some changes in how we handled our money, our relationship in this area was not going to change much either.

Now came the scary part. We had identified an area of our lives that was keeping us apart, but did we have the courage to address it? This is where our dialogue really helped. We spent several nights just getting in touch with our feelings and sharing them with each other. This created a real sense of intimacy between us. We were surprised to see how vulnerable we both were in this area. After our dialogue, we sat down and discussed our finances. We looked at every dollar we spent and began to look for ways to improve our lot in life.

It became obvious that we were going to have to take some pretty serious steps for awhile. We decided to sell our one year old car and pay off the loan at the credit union. We did that and then looked for a car we could buy for cash. We found an old station wagon that fit the ticket. It required constant attention and whether it was going to start or not was always a guess, but it gave us the necessary breathing room to regroup. During the next two years, we were able to clean up all of our finances and even began a steady pledge to our parish. It has been hard on our egos to make this change, but it has been great for our passion. An area of our life that had been destructive to our relationship was now a strength.

Today, fifteen years after our weekend, we are still talking about what we want for our life and our relationship. Dialogue is as important for that now as it was then.

Recently, a new job opportunity came along that offered more prestige, more money, more responsibility, maybe more travel. It gave us a reason to once again evaluate the things we were doing and how we spend our time. It was a time to once again remind ourselves that our relationship was more important than anything else in our lives. Yes, you guessed it; it caused us to re-evaluate this area of our life again.

This process of constant re-evaluation proved an on-going renewal of our passion for each other. It keeps our love fresh even after 25 years of marriage.

So in a nutshell, re-evaluation is the process of first deciding how we want to live our life together, identifying the things in our life that keep us from living that life, dialoguing on our feelings as they relate to all of this, carefully brainstorming changes we need to make, and then set about making them.

Don't forget the most important part of all of this is to make dialogue a daily event so you have the trust, intimacy, mutual acceptance, and respect in your lives to have these discussions. If you are struggling with daily dialogue, find a group of couples to meet with who can support each other. If you need help with the technique of dialogue contact your local team community for a copy of the WEDS manual. Good luck, and remember you can make your marriage anything you want if you both want it enough.