

Meridian Magazine  
**"The Infidelity Formula"**

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Contrary to popular wisdom infidelity is a potential danger for most all couples. What concerns me is the lack of awareness regarding how easily a "good person" gets from "That could never happen to me" to "I can't believe this has happened to me!"

In my counseling practice working with couples and seeing the interactions of people all around, I see a few key things that good people are doing that can have a devastating effect on their marriages and their lives.

To make it easier to remember, I have created this formula for infidelity:



Let's go through this step-by-step.

### **Vulnerability**

Vulnerability to infidelity can be based on a variety of things, such as:

- Dissatisfaction in marriage
- Addictions of any kind
- Depression or other mental health issues
- Financial pressures
- Stress
- Low self-worth
- Drug/alcohol use
- Lack of mental, emotional or physical boundaries
- Keeping secrets from your spouse

One can see from this list that nearly everyone can fit into at least one of these categories at one time or another. Identifying your own vulnerabilities can help to determine the appropriate course of action, rather than passively slipping into danger zones.

If there's dissatisfaction in your marriage, address it or get some good help to address it. Same with depression or other mental health issues. Financial pressures, stress, low self-worth, etc. all require some pointed attention as well to reduce their power as weakening agents in your marriage.

If there are addictions involved, seek the necessary professional help. Addictions are tough stuff to beat!

I'm continually updating this [repository of sexual addiction resources](#) to provide an easy go-to guide for addiction help.

Most addictions have similar roots with similar treatment needed, so hopefully this page will give you a good starting point for addiction healing and recovery.

Drugs and alcohol are natural disinhibitors, so any use of these substances even minimally will inevitably create a strong vulnerability toward stepping onto the slippery slope toward disaster.

On having secrets between you and your spouse, it's important to know that secrets are the lifeblood of addiction, and even in marriages without addiction, there's something sinister about the power secrets can have over an intimate relationship.

Couples need to have open and honest communication where no topic is really off limits. The intimate relationship in marriage should be a transparent relationship.

If you listen to my [Affair Proofing Your Marriage](#) podcasts ("[The Marital Intimacy Show](#)" episodes #005 - #008) you'll know that I even suggest that couples make it a point to remove any secrecy surrounding attractions that may begin to develop toward anyone other than your spouse.

Identifying and setting up healthy mental, emotional and physical boundaries is paramount. We'll discuss this further under the section of "One Dumb Decision."

### **Opportunity**

With vulnerability comes dangerous opportunity. Opportunities abound for unintended extra-marital relationships to occur. These are just a few of the common places where vulnerability may unfortunately meet opportunity:

- The workplace
- Traveling for work/conventions
- Facebook/social media
- The Internet
- Gyms/health clubs
- etc.

Opportunities can technically be almost anywhere...even at church. So, the key issue here is reducing your vulnerability, because it's not very likely that you can eliminate opportunity unless you live on a deserted island.

Without clearly defined and practiced boundaries, vulnerability can easily meet opportunity whether it's

just going to work or going to workout at the gym, which leads me to the topic of dumb decisions...

## One Dumb Decision

When there's vulnerability in your heart, mind or marriage, and opportunities abound, it's only a matter of one dumb decision to put you on a path that is a dangerous slippery slope.

In discussing this infidelity formula with a client, I asked him to start by telling me about maybe one dumb decision he had made in his relationships with co-workers. He told me he was already on dumb decision number nine. So, we carefully walked back from dumb decision #9 to dumb decision #1 to identify all the susceptible areas.

It's recognizing the first dumb decision and putting healthy boundaries in place that are key to keeping you in safe spiritual and marital territory.

All the possible dumb decisions are too numerous to name, so suffice it to say that the following should give a pretty good idea of some things to avoid:

- Flirting/sexual innuendos
- Touching
- Texting
- Linger
- Fantasizing
- Eye contact/giving "that look"
- Dressing provocatively
- Sharing too much information
- Taking off your wedding ring
- Being alone with someone you feel attracted to
- Seeking or creating opportunities to be together

These boundary-breaking behaviors seem like no brainers, but without self-awareness and consciously setting strong boundaries many of these can easily be ignored and counted as innocent interactions.

## Preventative Measures

Healthy boundaries begin in the mind, so being aware of your thoughts and motives is vital. Knowing your vulnerabilities and noticing that so-and-so sure seems to touch you a lot, or that you spend a lot of time thinking about so-and-so, or that you happen to flirt with or ask so-and-so a lot of questions at work these need to become red flags for you in your own mind.

If there's any question, it may be a good rule of thumb to ask yourself if a particular action would be acceptable to your spouse if he/she were present.

If you notice yourself lingering mentally, emotionally or physically you may need to employ the "3-Second Rule." This requires that you recognize the thought then replace it or redirect your mind, your heart or your physical presence as quickly as possible. You may need to physically move away or move your attention to something else.

I like the idea a client had to wear their CTR ring as a reminder to "Choose to Replace" any unhealthy thought in employing the 3-Second Rule.

To deny power to the infidelity formula, two of the primary preventative measures to incorporate are:

- (1) Reducing your vulnerability; and
- (2) Setting healthy mental, emotional and physical boundaries in order to avoid making even the first dumb decision!

Your homework for reducing your vulnerability is to identify what your specific susceptibilities are and choose one thing you can do to start fortifying that aspect of your life.

Your homework for creating healthy boundaries and avoiding dumb decisions is to determine maybe five specific things that you will commit to no longer do in your interactions with others. Write them down and share them with your spouse if at all possible.

It may not be easy to make these changes, and you may have to re-teach others how to interact with you appropriately. There may be some discomfort or even awkward moments, but if it means avoiding the devastating destruction that comes from infidelity it will hopefully be well worth it!

## Related Resources:

- PODCASTS -- "[Affair Proofing Your Marriage](#)" (episodes #005 - #008) of [The Marital Intimacy Show](#) by Laura M. Brotherson
- BOOK -- *Grow Your Marriage by Leaps and Boundaries* by Jerry L. Cook

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*Marriage and intimacy expert, Laura M. Brotherson, LMFT, CST, is the author of [And They Were Not Ashamed—Strengthening Marriage through Sexual Fulfillment](#), host of "[The Marital Intimacy Show](#)" and founder of the [Marriage Messages](#) videos. Visit her website [StrengtheningMarriage.com](#) to learn more.*