

Marriage as a Collaborative Alliance

Thoughts from Dr. David Schnarch, author of *Passionate Marriage* and *Intimacy and Desire*

The following thoughts from Dr. David Schnarch's *Crucible* approach may help individuals and couples understand: (1) the vital role of being a solid, emotionally differentiated self in relationship to one's spouse, (2) the value of creating a collaborative alliance in your marriage, and (3) the effects on intimacy and sexual desire.



What is a Collaborative Alliance in Marriage?

1. Spouses working toward mutual goals even when it's difficult, and even if you don't "feel" like it.
2. Being honest even when it may be disadvantageous.
3. Not tampering with the "data" or truth, such as providing just enough or not providing enough information in order to deceive another.
4. Always confronting yourself before the other. Challenging yourself before you challenge your spouse.
5. Allowing your partner to confront and "read" you. Don't shield your mind from being read accurately.
6. Relationship responsibilities/disclosures are unilateral (one-way), not mutual or reciprocal--meaning you fulfill your responsibilities, speak your truth whether the other is doing so as well or not.

Additional Thoughts on Collaborative Alliance

- A collaborative alliance does not always mean you will be making your partner feel good. You may need to confront, challenge or even refuse to accommodate at times.
- You may need to endure discomfort for the purpose of growth.
- In a collaborative alliance you are responsible for your impact regardless of your intent. Because of the brain's ability to "mind map," you do know what you are doing.
- A collaborative alliance is founded on differentiation or the Crucible 4 Points of Balance.

What is Differentiation?

- *Differentiation* is the ability to hold onto yourself while maintaining relationships with others.
- *Differentiation* is the phenomenon that applies to all living things, but in human beings it is the ability to balance humankind's two fundamental drives for attachment and autonomy. Wanting to be in a relationship and wanting to be our own person are the two fundamental problems that couples have.
- *Differentiation* is the ability to be very much involved in a relationship and also be able to be your own person within that relationship.
- *Differentiation* is emotional resilience, standing on your own two feet emotionally, not being infected by or reactive to another's anxieties, having a solid sense of self not a reflected or other-validated sense of self.
- *Differentiation* may be understood by a lack of differentiation, which may entail avoidance of self-confrontation, having unclear personal values, having a reflected sense of self (needing other's validation and acceptance) rather than a self-reflected or God-reflected self.

Are you Differentiated?

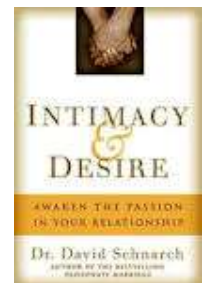
- Solid sense of self
- Ability to self-regulate emotion
- Self-validated not other-validated
- Emotional self-reliance
- Emotional resilience (not being reactive to others)
- Standing on your own two feet
- Balances need for connection with need for autonomy

What are the [Crucible 4 Points of Balance](#)?

1. **Solid Flexible Self™**: Having a sense of your own self-worth that perseveres through hard times. Maintaining personal stability, direction, and purpose guided by internalized values, principles, and goals especially when people and situations around you are out of emotional balance. People with a solid sense of self can change over time. They can change their values when it's appropriate, but they don't do it with pressure from the outside—they do it from within.
2. **Quiet Mind and Calm Heart™**: Self-regulation, containing your anxiety, calming yourself down, soothing your own emotions. A quiet mind and calm heart provides emotional autonomy, which creates relationship stability and flexibility.
3. **Grounded Responding™**: Making balanced, timely, appropriate responses to difficult people and situations. Not over-reacting to other people's over-reactions. Addressing things you'd prefer to avoid.
4. **Meaningful Endurance™**: Diligent effort in the face of frustration, failure, and disappointment. Tolerating discomfort for growth. Absorbing hardship, disappointment and bouncing back after defeat. Human resilience.

Differentiation and Sexual Desire

- Sexual desire problems (the sexual crucible in marriage) can be used to increase your differentiation and possibly rewire your brain.
- The four drives of sexual desire are: (1) lust, (2) romantic love, (3) attachment and (4) the drive to develop and maintain a "self."
- Once you understand the difference between other-validated intimacy and self-validated intimacy, and how dependence on other-validated intimacy creates emotional gridlock, it changes the way you see sexual desire.
- For additional information:
 - [New Perspectives on Desire](#)
 - [Insights at the Edge with David Schnarch](#)
 - [Your Sexiest Self--How To Get It Back](#)



"Marriage's 'polishing process' uses each spouse as the abrasive to finish the other's development."

~Dr. David Schnarch,
Passionate Marriage, p. 202

Thoughts on The Crucible Approach for Couples

- The Crucible Approach departs from conventional practice including shunning the common emphasis on other-validated intimacy and emphasizing self-validated intimacy.
- There's nothing wrong with wanting to feel validated, accepted and unconditionally loved. But if you depend on a reflected sense of self, you crash when these aren't forthcoming.
- Intimacy is an incredible system built into marriage, driven by the natural forces of differentiation. Intense intimacy is often unsettling. Poorly differentiated people don't want to be truly known. They want acceptance, validation, and reciprocal disclosure to pump up their reflected sense of self. Crucible Therapy helps people develop intimacy tolerance and greater capacity for self-validated intimacy, which resolves couples' emotional gridlock.
- Where most therapists believe that intimacy grows through things such as mutual trust, acceptance, empathy, validation, and reciprocal disclosure, the Crucible approach instead suggests that intimacy grows through conflict, unilateral disclosure, and self-validation. Or, in other words, intimacy grows from, growing up.