Gottman's Circle of Compromise

"Often compromise is just a matter of talking out your differences and preferences in a systematic way." Dr Gottman

The key word here is systematic. By following a step-by-step approach — nothing more, nothing less — you avoid getting sidetracked because there are *specific* activities you must complete in a *specific* order to finish the exercise.

This is the essence of the Two-Circle Method. It provides a framework that helps you and your significant other tackle difficult problems from beginning to end.

STEPS

1. Decide with your partner which problem you wish to discuss.
2. Sit separately and think about the chosen problem. "On a piece of paper, draw two circles — a smaller one inside a larger one. In the inner circle, make a list of the aspects of the problem you can't give in on. On the outer circle, list all of the aspects of the problem you *can* compromise over." In other words, put your absolute needs in the inner circle and your wants in the outer circle.
3. Share your circles with each other, keeping two goals in mind: Understanding your partner's needs (inner circle) and working with his or her wants to reach a compromise (outer circle).
4. Ask yourself these questions: *What do we agree about? What are our common feelings or the most important feelings here? What common goals can we have? How can we understand this situation or issue? How do we think we should accomplish these goals?*
5. Once you find common ground, test the agreed-upon solution for a specified time before revisiting the topic. Decide if it works. If not, restart the exercise.

PITFALLS AND TIPS

Though effective, the Two-Circle Method isn't miraculous. Sometimes, problems have been simmering for so long that anytime they're approached, uncontrollable emotions explode.

To overcome this hurdle, consider the following tips:

- If your heart accelerates and you feel winded (flooding) — take a break of at least twenty minutes. Once you're calm, try again.
- Try to keep your outer circle (areas of flexibility) as large as possible, and your inner circle (non-negotiable areas) as small as possible. "Remember the aikido principle of yielding to win — the more able you are to make concessions, the better able you'll be to persuade your spouse."
- Avoid - criticism, contempt, defensiveness, or stonewalling.
- Reward yourself after a successful Two-Circle exercise.

REMEMBER:

- You are a team
- You and your partner aren't adversaries. Deep down, you both want the same thing. You both want to feel loved. You both want your relationship to thrive.