

## RASH MOVES

The other day my mate from Cape Town confessed to me how fed up he was with his marriage, job and almost everything else that came to mind. He said he was infected with the boredom bug and it was eating away at him, making him feel downright miserable. Not quite the seven-year-itch because they have only been together one and a half years but as he put it, more like relationship eczema.

Boredom is a common marital problem that can materialise early on in a relationship. Couples often find that after the honeymoon period is behind them and they have settled into married life, it isn't quite the constant bed of roses that they imagined it to be. Historically when we heard of a divorce it was blamed on that seven-year-itch but today's studies suggest that relationships are more likely to break down after only two years. Perhaps these days we need an accelerated table for relationship breakdown – the 1-year rash, 2-year eczema, 3-year impetigo and so on?

So what happens? Sometimes what you perceive to be the perfect marriage breaks down purely through boredom, the sheer monotony of no surprises, no challenge and no change. We often get into the habit of focusing on day-to-day needs such as earning money to pay the mortgage and forget what life should be all about and why we married in the first place.

Now read the last few paragraphs back and see how easy and relevant it would be if we substituted marriage for the employment relationship. There is an obvious parallel and it doesn't matter if it is marriage or work, boredom is the enemy. When you are bored life seems to weigh down on your shoulders, everything seems an effort. Five minutes seems a very long time and a day like an eternity. Boredom can lead to depression and the feeling that something is very wrong. It's a real problem that if left unresolved can be both relationship and soul-destroying. When my mother was bored (more accurately fed up) she used to muse 'I could run a mile'. The inference was twofold – either that running a mile was less of a bore than what she was currently doing or that she just wanted to get away.

So what is boredom? Wikipedia describes it as 'an unpleasant, [transient affective state](#) in which the [individual feels](#) a [pervasive lack](#) of [interest](#) in and difficulty concentrating on the current activity'. I got bored just reading it. But the point I think it was getting at was boredom arises not for a lack of things to do but the inability to latch onto any specific activity. Nothing interests us, despite an often profound desire for engagement.

The answer to relationship boredom isn't always easy but the problem can be resolved if the mutual will is there. As a starting point you need to consciously make time for each other. Make an effort, plan evenings out, think about what you used to do before you got married, consider what was most exciting and re-introduce some of those elements back into your life. And even though this may seem unpalatable and unconventional, the same behaviour and attitudes can be adopted for the employer/employee relationship. During the performance appraisal and being cognisant of the need to keep the relationship healthy the employer should ask the employee if he/she still feels good about working there and if the relationship is meeting its potential. If not the employer should look for those trigger points to engage the employee again.

Unfortunately the employer more often than not doesn't see the relationship as being a two-way partnership involving choices by both parties. Like the old South African masters and servants act they see the employee as being someone who should just be grateful to be in the relationship in the first place. Now if you've ever been in an intimate relationship with a person and he/or she has the attitude that you should be grateful for the ride (no pun intended), then you know that subservient relationships don't really work unless you are a dominatrix.

It's impossible to say exactly what is needed to rekindle the flame with your employees or spouse because our likes and preferences are not all the same but we all need passion, engagement and commitment. You need to take time to think about what would make your life and your relationship spark again, treat each day as special and re-introduce that passion into the relationship.

It doesn't take a marriage guidance counsellor to tell you how to spice up your love life and put the sparkle back into your relationship but if you really can't think of anything to make your work life less boring and your boss isn't being much help. here are some of the suggestions I found posted on a whacky web site recently.

- Page yourself over the intercom. (Don't disguise your voice.)
- Find out where your boss shops and buy exactly the same outfits. Always wear them one day after your boss does. (This is especially effective if your boss is a different gender than you are.)
- And then my best – put your wastepaper bin on your desk and label it 'INCOMING'.

See, the possibilities are endless. No need to be bored at work at all. But if your spouse starts cross-dressing in the same clothes as you or a pedal bin appears on the bed, you'd better either treat the rash or seriously scratch that itch!

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