

The Black Man's Journey To The Altar & Beyond Vol. 1

The best kept secrets about successful
relationships

BY

Andre C. Hatchett & Friends

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DEDICATION

To all the Black Men who are in healthy, committed relationships and marriages. Thank you for being great examples.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	i
INTRODUCTION	1
1 BRANDON REED	2
2 CHRIS JOHNSON	Pg 4
3 DERRICK ALFORD	Pg 7
4 JASON STUBBLEFIELD	Pg 10
5 LEX KELLY	Pg 14
6 MIKE DORSEY	Pg 22
7 SHANNON STEWART	Pg 25
8 VILARD “TIGER” TOLEDO	Pg 28
9 TREVOR CASSABERRY	Pg 32
10 I’VE MESSED UP! WHAT DO I DO NOW? AND WHAT SHOULDN’T I DO NOW?	Pg 37
OUTRO	47
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	50

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I would like to thank the following brothers who shared their honest relationship experience with us. You being honest and vulnerable will help give a solid foundation to many brothers, myself included.

Brandon Reed
Chris Johnson
Derrick Alford
Jason Stubblefield
Lex Kelly
Mike Dorsey
Shannon Stewart
Vilard “Tiger” Toledo
Trevor Cassaberry

INTRODUCTION

In 2018, I did an amazing thing; I married an amazing lady and the love of my life! I realized after I was married that I did not prepare enough for the hard times.

I didn't have an outline, a roadmap, or a guide to follow when things shift for the worse. I also didn't know how to get them back on track.

So, I planned on reaching out to some friends for advice and to help me build my relationship skills. But at the time, I felt that wasn't good enough. Other brothers needed some help as well. So In April of 2019, I reached out to some friends and social media asking for assistance with giving some honest advice about being in a long-term relationship. Not just the pretty stuff people show you, but hard times and how to get past them.

This book is written with the assumption that you are with or will be with a quality lady.

I am not crazy. Not every woman is worthy of the top levels of relationship, don't treat the others bad; just leave.

There are other books that will go into detail about picking and scouting for the right lady.

This is a manual or guide written by and for Black Men. It will be of immeasurable help to you in that it will:

1. Help you prepare for the hard times and issues you will face in your relationship.
2. Help you minimize how long issues last.
3. Show you that you are not alone; you have support, and you have other men to learn from.
4. Show you the things you MUST avoid at all costs.

It is not a fairytale story. It's an honest story; a real story...

1 NAME: BRANDON REED

IG: B_REED33

AGE: 31

How long have you been in a relationship?

It has been four years since the start of my relationship, and yes, she is the one.

Why did you get into this long-term relationship?

I had been single for almost 8 years before I met Erica and honestly, I thought I was ok with being single. I enjoyed dating at the time and didn't think I would meet the right one anytime soon. At the same time, there were a few situations where I thought I had the right person, but that definite gut feeling just wasn't there, you just kind of know. I guess it was good that I had been single for that long because I got a chance to figure out what I liked in a woman and what I didn't like. It was also a time to get all that dating out of my system, honestly, because in 2014, that would all come to an end.

When I met Erica, it was completely random and so refreshing. I gave up my seat for her at a restaurant that was jam-packed; we talked for a long time that night and had great conversation. Even though I didn't exchange numbers with her, she recalled me telling her where I had come from that night, so she went back to that bar for three weekends in a row. On the third Saturday, she found me, and I haven't been without her since then (long story short).

My outlook from my perspective:

So we have been together for almost 5 years and we have an amazing family together now and a great relationship, but things have been an uphill

climb for us. We've honestly faced every scenario you can think of in our time together that could go wrong in a relationship, but have worked through those things. I think we work because things generally come easy for us. We agree on most things when it comes to everyday life decisions. We both have been willing to work on the things we lack to make this situation work. One of our biggest struggles has been communication in our relationship, but we have made it our job to perfect this very important piece in our relationship. Honestly over-communicating is the key to it all. It's never a good idea to be silent in a relationship; you have to put it all out there so that you both are constantly on the same page and know where you both stand.

Lastly, taking the time to know that you have the right person is key, so get to know them. Be willing to put in the work to make it last, and don't forcefully be with someone for the wrong reasons. It's a marathon not a sprint.

2

NAME: CHRIS JOHNSON

IG HANDLE: @MRCJOHNSON007

AGE: 43

How long have you been married?

It will be 14 years on the 30th of June 2019.

Tell us something that went wrong in your marriage. And how you/both of you guys recovered from it:

I never pictured myself being married. I remember being in my early 20's and making it very clear to anyone who wanted to know about my dating life - "I will not get married and I will not have children." What moved my heart to marriage was reading the Bible. It gave me a different perspective on marriage and children which directed my time and energy into goals that would transcend my life beyond my own physical existence. The positive thing I see about my marriage is how my wife and I complement each other and work as a team for us to win as one. When a couple desires to use all of the resources they have at their disposal to help one another become the person the creator made them to become, this is the best way for a relationship to successfully work long-term. Strong individuals when joined together, make stronger unions.

Individually, we both have solid and promising careers, so we help each

other excel in our chosen professional spaces. For example, as an engineer and mostly entrepreneur, I have lost everything twice. I mean down to the last nickel. I was not married the first time I went from financial hero to financial zero. However, when it happened the second time, I was married with one child and had another on the way. I remember telling her plain and simple, “This is the best time to leave me.” It sounds harsh but it was the truth. I reasoned that if she loved me for my money, I did not have any more of the stuff, and she should take the quickest exit out of my life to find someone who did have some money. Time has proven that my wife did not favor me for my money, as she chose to stay. I told her after she resolved to stay and endure a long recovery, “Everything I have lost, I will restore.” Sure enough, it took ten years of selfless planning, tirelessly working, and consistently learning to restore all of those losses. Not only did I keep my word to restore everything that was lost, I was able to recover all the resources to the tune of three-fold, and it still continues to grow.

During this period, she followed my vision and leadership, as we both supported one another. It helped me to become the successful entrepreneur I am today. In contrast, I have motivated, planned, and directed her career since its inception. My efforts have helped her to develop and shape a phenomenal personal brand, where she is now looked upon as a trusted leader in her field. My guidance, through conversations, life lessons, and business counsel, has helped to catapult her into a frontrunner and visible thought leader, a highly sought after national speaker, and consultant. I live the life of my wildest dreams and she lives the life of her wildest dreams. Professionally speaking, we are giants in our own individual rights, but collectively as a married couple, we are future titans.

General marriage/relationship advice:

Avoid getting married because of external pressure or intervening causes, such as an unexpected child or some form of temporary convenience. Get married because you have met someone you're compatible with and can build a life together. In hindsight, I can see friends and family members who have been married two or more times and each time, it was for questionable reasons. Even if the idea of getting married involves a noble notion of

chivalry or manly duties--do not do it. Get married because the person is someone you can see yourself building a life with now and in the future. Any other reason besides that, you would be better off making other arrangements. I say this because, marriage is a business contract, and it takes a great deal of time and energy to maintain. Why go into it already compromising? That does not make any sense to me, because even people who go into marriage with the right reasons still struggle; how much more will couples struggle if they go into the relationship misaligned?

And lastly, how do you know you are compatible? Go through any means to determine with absolute certainty that you connect with that person mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and financially, both now and in the future. If there is a 'disconnect' in any of these areas, rest assured; it will most likely be the fault line when the earthquakes of life destroys the marriage union.

3

NAME: DERRICK ALFORD

IG HANDLE: @BROTHER_DERRICK_COACHES

AGE: 28 (BIRTHDAY IS 02/05/91)

How long have you been in a long-term relationship?

It will be 4 years on the 18th of September 2019. Brothers, make sure you remember your Queen's birthday and anniversary days, because they ALWAYS remember!

Why did you get married or enter into a long-term relationship?

I entered a relationship because I enjoy partnership. I enjoy spending time with my partner and taking her on dates and just having someone to share different experiences with. I also don't believe GOD created us to be alone. In addition, I found that being in a long-term relationship with one person was most beneficial because it allowed me to focus on just that person and to know and grow with them intimately. I learned that people that were dealing with multiple partners were much less accomplished and usually more preoccupied with trying to balance all these different people who would also be pulling you in different directions. Find and keep one partner. All you need is one, the right one!

Why did you ask your wife to marry/be with you?

I am not yet married yet, but I plan to be in the near future. I chose my

Queen because when I first saw her I knew she was different from any other women I had ever seen. She looked very special and kept to herself; she was both drama and gossip-free. I had an intuition that she was a good person which made me take my shot, so here we are.

Ever since I met her, my life has improved by like 1000%. For real though! She has helped me so much over the years. Since we have been together she has helped me make better decisions with my money, helped me improve my diet, which led to me becoming a vegan, and helped me get off child support. In summary, I was paying child support for my son that was with me most of the time. My son's mother was milking the system like many do. I now have primary custody of my son and no longer pay child support! But it doesn't even stop there!

We started our first business together thanks to the Big Bro, Andre Hatchett, and the Notary Business School. She has also helped me find and acquire my first duplex as well as quit my job! Yea, we make a great team. I have helped her get her credit established so she could acquire her first duplex as well as motivating her to get into nursing school. The right partner is definitely a blessing. I wouldn't be at this place in life, right now, if it wasn't for her!

How do you get past the hard times and/or resolve conflict and issues within your relationship?

We communicate a lot even when we are both upset. On such occasions, I take a walk or drive at the end of the night. But in the end we usually talk and work things out. I am working on resolving issues even sooner because time is precious, and sometimes, issues can be resolved in better ways, if you work on them then and there instead of letting them linger longer than they need to. However, conflicts will occur. It is two people coming together from two different households, with two different upbringings, so there are bound to be some disagreements. The best way is to communicate is; as much as possible, be honest and fair and always try to resolve all issues that come up

as soon as you both are able to. Don't let issues linger!

General relationship advice for brothers:

Take your time and really figure out what you don't want in a relationship so you can begin to search for what you do want. Also, make sure you take the time to fully know the woman you are dating. Watch how the woman you are interested in or are dating treats her family, especially the men in her family, because that will be a reflection on how she will treat you. I recommend that brothers should date women that have their fathers or have had a good relationship with a male figure at some point in their lives. I say this because from my observations women without a strong male figure in their lives do not value or respect a good man when they have one.

Also, don't focus on sex as much. Yes, it is important, but I believe enjoying sex too much blinds us from seeing the real person and traps us in situations that we could have and should have avoided. Try to find a partner that has the same values as you and don't settle for less just because you have not found your queen yet. She is out there. I believe that if you continue to work on yourself and better yourself you will find her sooner than you think. Mine was delivered right to me when she was transferred to the department I was working in at the time.

Lastly, be patient with yourself and your partner. Nothing worth keeping comes easy and there will be challenges, but always communicate and PUT YOUR PRIDE TO THE SIDE. If you mess up admit your faults and flaws. A good woman is hard to find in this day and age so once you get one, do everything in your power to keep her because they truly are a blessing. Peace and Love Y'all.

- Brother Derrick

4

NAME: JASON STUBBLEFIELD

IG HANDLE: @JSTBBLFL

AGE: 38

How long have you been married?

It will be Nine years on 8/10/2019.

Why did you get married and/or enter into a long term relationship?

I always saw myself having a family one day. Even though we as men don't usually desire the fairy tale wedding, I always knew I wanted to be a husband and father one day. I was fortunate enough to grow up in a two parent household. My dad was my disciplinarian and friend. I couldn't imagine bringing another life into the world and not trying to have some influence on my children. That was a nice thought until I experienced the downsides of relationships and dating. I had my share of drama. I gave hurt and received my own in return. At one point, I gave up on the whole marriage idea. I contemplated being someone's baby daddy - even convinced myself of it in my early 20s. Once I put more thought into how my family relationship would be as a long-term baby daddy, I realized that wouldn't be ideal. Would I really gamble the unity of family by not committing to marriage? I couldn't see that happening, so I knew marriage would be the way to go for me.

Why did you ask your wife to marry/be with you?

One night, I had an epiphany when it came to my future wife. I believed that God loved me and would grant me the desires of my heart, so I decided to pray for my future wife. This wasn't just one prayer, but more like a series of them. I didn't want any ambiguity, so I tried to get rather specific. I prayed about how she would look, how we would get along, how I would feel about her, the color of her (black) skin, and more. I wasn't superficial. I didn't pray for a model or the perfect measurements. I prayed for some looks, but mostly intangibles that I felt I could grow with. I said my 'wife-prayers' for years without receiving the answer.

When I met my wife, we started dating and I thought this was just a regular courtship, but I immediately knew she was different. Slowly, I started to realize that she matched up to everything I had been praying for - and more! I was shocked. When I compared her to my request, there wasn't anything I could think of that she didn't have. "God, is this it?" I asked. I shared this conversation with a friend of mine and she gave me some incredible advice. She said that if I believe she's the one, then I should also pray for confirmation. That's exactly what I did. Over the next couple of days, it seemed as if little confirmations occurred regularly. I took notice of all of them but I still wanted more. The same week, my small confirmation came; my future wife and I decided to have dinner. At some point she looked at me and said, "I know you're going to marry me". In shock I responded with some slight arrogance. "Really? How do you know?" She put her hands together and bowed her head in a prayer gesture to me. I was astonished. It was a subtle suggestion but it meant everything to me considering that I'd already be vacillating about if she was the one. To know that woman I had been praying about had also been praying for me was my final deciding factor. After that, I knew it was only a matter of time before I would propose.

How do you get past the hard times and/or resolve conflict and issues within your marriage?

The first three years of our marriage were good, but we would periodically have these heated explosions. We would go months without an argument and then suddenly we we'd be at each other's throats. Each eruption would

get more intense than the last, and by the third year it blew up into something almost irrecoverable. It was at that point we sought out counseling and learned some tips to help up resolve conflict.

I wanted the counseling to address my wife, but it really addressed me. It was tough but I learned a valuable life lesson. I was to take responsibility for everything. That didn't feel good because I wanted to point the finger, but if I am considered the leader of my household, then a bad household is a result of bad leadership. I focused solely on myself, and that started with my mindset. I realized that I harbored negative thoughts about my wife. I let my dating mentality follow me into marriage. I fought to correct that and realized that the real battle was in my own mind. Whenever I thought negatively about my wife, I would immediately start thinking about the truthful, noble, pure, loveable qualities that she possessed.

It was hard at first but it did get better. I was the real benefactor of the mindset shift. Instead of walking around in anger toward my wife, I was able to release it and feel better about her and whatever situation I was upset about. The true benefit is that once I felt better about her, I could treat her better. I stuck with that and soon the law of reciprocation took effect. It was as if she was waiting to see that I really cared and loved her to unleash her respect for me. She would match and even exceed my contributions to her. We completely morphed from a rocky marriage into one where we continuously support and love each other.

We don't completely avoid conflict, but we do practice exercises to help us resolve them. Twice a week we schedule to engage in intimate conversation. We take showers and get into the bed. We then begin praying for each other. She says her prayer for me and then I pray for her. After that it's our opportunity to discuss what's going on in our marriage. If there is a problem, we first try to repeat the problem to make sure we're hearing the other person. Next we acknowledge our part in making the other feel that way and try to work out a compromise that works for both of us. The best thing about this process is that it gives us a comfortable place to discuss our issues. Most of the time there isn't anything negative to discuss. When that happens, we use the time to recognize the good in our marriage. I thank her

for her contributions such as making my meals, helping with the kids, supporting my business, or even bedroom favors. She returns it by expressing her gratitude for what I've done for her. Since we've started doing this process, we've really avoided the explosions. If we do have a heated argument, the problem doesn't linger long without getting discussed and put to rest.

General marriage advice for brothers:

You don't marry looks, effort, sexual skills, or even chemistry. You marry the essence of a person. You marry who they really are - their core being. It's like a seed that will grow and change with different seasons. You want to make sure that you have a solid foundation with whom you're committing to. If we men were to really be honest, we want god-like characteristics in a spouse. Love, honesty, loyalty, trust, humility, and kindness are all god-like traits. Why would you ever seek god-like characteristics in an ungodly person? I'm not saying you need to pull your potential mate off of some church pew - but the divine qualities in her should be evident.

You attract what you are. I would be remiss not to mention the personal development aspect of marriage. Once you find your mate, be prepared to take complete responsibility. This is going to require some maturation on your part, but you can handle it. Marriage is for grown folks! Understand that when you find your mate and she gives herself to you, then you become the leader of her and your household. If your wife sees you take a stance to lead your family into what is right and noble, then you will uncover one of the best support systems you can ever have. Follow truth and watch her follow you.

5

NAME: LEX KELLY

FATHER OF 3

BEEN IN A CO-CREATIVE EXPERIENCE FOR 13
YEARS

OCCUPATION: OWNER OF LIFE KINECTION
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PERSPECTIVE SHIFTING, PERSONAL
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“Relationships are nothing but reflections and representations of ourselves in every moment; they are the guiding footprints of our choices, intentions, and levels of internal health or lack thereof.”- Lex Kelly

Since I chose the work of a healer, and personal development and relationship strategist, being asked my perspective on quality of life and relationships is a common place for me. So much so, I have written books and curriculums to allow others to expand through my insight. So, when Brother Andre Hatchett asked for my energy towards this subject, I was not

just honored but also comfortable with doing so. How I choose to project my level of understanding into this body of work is a bit of a challenge, but a good challenge. So I have decided to be as organic as possible and open up my mind to offer a few of the many realizations I've come too in this co-creative journey of mine. I will be eliminating titles and social ideas in this writing because again I want to be as organic as possible and I live my life stripping away the social titles that have come attached.

Society loves to put titles and boxes around our experiences of and one another for many reasons. Much like my own life, I will remove all possessive vibrations, words, and titles (i.e. My, Wife, hers, husband, etc.) from this contribution. I will address this wonderful, beautiful Sista God by her name Ray. She is so many things before she is my anything but in reality, she is not mine at all and I am not hers. We belong to ourselves and we share ourselves with each other through our own level of self-ownership. From this space is where all the real work gets done. From this space is where accountability, self-awareness, and self-reflection are generated. These attributes are what detoxes and creates a natural system of elimination of all the bullshit we complain about. A natural immune system to the experiences that have you reading the book right now.

When we require ourselves to take ownership of ourselves in every situation instead of redirecting and projecting them onto others, we begin to see light and clarity in our relationships. When it comes to relationships, we see struggle because we fail to address the many aspects of ourselves and the many aspects of the person we claim to know and love. We have been conditioned to skip to the good part, the fantasy, the aspect of the other person we feel comfortable laying claim to. This is where neglect is created. In the space between self-ownership and societal ownership. When we are not taught to take ownership of ourselves and to develop and heal ourselves, we create neglect. When we neglect ourselves, we neglect others'. When we neglect others', we neglect the relationship and fail to provide them with the substance and nutrients needed to provide a full experience to the relationship. Couple that with possessive titles, ideas and beliefs, we have a perfect recipe for a disastrous relationship full of oppression and void of authentic creative expression.

So, out of respect for Sista God's complete being, I will address her by her name Ray, and speak briefly on our experiences as individuals experiencing each other. It is my hope that you as a reader can tap into a small glimpse of my reality and receive some kind nutrients from it.

The organic truth is at the beginning of my relationship with Ray. I had absolutely no intention of creating the experience I am currently in today. It was purely me tossing out my hook of good vibes and if I happen to catch some attention that I valued in that moment then let it be done.

Did I know I wanted to be a father? Absolutely!

Did I know I wanted to be with a quality woman that I could enjoy a union with? Absolutely!

Did I know what that union looked like outside of what society had fed my mind? Absolutely Not!

Matter of fact, damn near all the relationships that I had witnessed from others were highly oppressive and dysfunctional to me. There was not one relationship that I see on a surface level that I looked at and said to myself, "Now that is a relationship that I want for myself." Literally every man that I knew, no matter how they managed themselves, were fuckin miserable for the most part. It seemed like they had no freedoms, more obligations, and less sex than they before they got into the union. Nearly every woman I knew who was in a union was miserable. It seemed as if they lost their energy for life like they lost their fire. That sex appeal that had all the men competing in the first place. All I ever witnessed people doing was celebrating the title, not the experience. I knew enough to know I didn't want that shit, but I did not know how to not create it for myself.

Sure, enough boom! I found myself in a relationship with less freedom of expression, more obligation, and less sex! And if we don't understand the value of intentions in our behavior, we learn really quickly that the universe has a default setting that attracts certain "situations" and lessons our way. So, because of this lack of intention from myself and Ray, we set upon this co-creative journey of frustration and trying to figure shit. Add three kids to that and we found ourselves reevaluating our motivation often. Fast forward

without going into my biography, here we are 13 yrs. and three children into our journey. Now, a brief a preview of all the shit in between.

From the time we met up until now, have we both been completely monogamous? Nope!

Have we said things to one another that created resentment, hurt and pain? Yep!

Is our relationship perfect and a model for society? Who the fuck is perfect? I hear many people talk about him/her, but I have not been introduced to perfect yet.

Did we get over the hurt and confusion? Yep! How are we doing it? Well, like Kevin Hart says, "Let me explain!"

First, she had a child already outside of me and although my manhood was not completely functional at the time we met, I knew it was my responsibility to be a strong example of a man in his life, so I chose to make sure I showed up as an asset for him no matter what. Like I said I always knew I wanted to be a father and not only a father but a quality father. So, it was important to me that I showed all the way up if I was going to be in his life. Moving along, when our first daughter arrived, I was completely committed to being present and ready to do whatever it took to make sure my daughter had a positive nurturing childhood experience. How was I going to do it? I had no idea, but I knew it required some serious work and growth on my part. One year later my second daughter arrived, and she lit an extra fire under my ass! The amount of work has been extensive and valuable for both of us, here are some lessons and tools we picked up along the way.

Relationships are nothing but reflections and representations of ourselves in every moment; they are the guiding footprints of our choices, intentions, and level of internal health. Our relationships are a reflection of what we choose to hold on to, let go of, value, create, invest or not invest in ourselves. I learned through my studies of myself and knowledge passed down from my ancestors and a few other faces that if we want to truly learn about ourselves, we must acknowledge, take responsibility, and study the relationships we have attracted and co-created throughout our lifetime, and what they've

produced for us up until this present moment. From that space of acknowledgment and awareness, Ray and I learned so much about our contributions or lack of contribution to our relationship.

We learned that we were holding on to a lot of dysfunction. We were dependent on much of what we were holding on to because it was the only thing we knew. It was all a collaboration of ideas, beliefs and defense mechanisms that were never challenged, examined or vetted. We just accepted them as natural law. After gaining the courage to challenge social norms, beliefs systems, systematic social engineering, conditioning and generational dysfunction that have been projected onto us from society, our relatives or some shit we bootlegged and conjured up to get over or get by, Ray and I found out quickly that we were co-creating much of the obstacles we were trying to overcome.

To assist in eliminating those obstacles attached to us, we learned to adopt a behavior of physical, energetic, and psychological detoxification. A regimen of self-examination, self-awareness, and mindfulness. We examined all the ideas created within us and outside of us. We learned to be brave enough to ask the questions. Who created and designed these schools of thought that we hold on to? Are they effective or infected? When were they created and why? Under what circumstances? What was the intention in creating these “Rules” and how do they serve our relationship with ourselves, between one another, our family, and the community we live in? If those questions could not be answered or the belief systems were not found to be functional, we detoxed them in pursuit of our own healing.

That brings us to the next! HEALING! A high level of personal development and healing is the foundation for all healthy relationships including my own. Again, relationships are footprints of our level of internal health or lack thereof. When we are honest with ourselves about the kind of contribution and level of contribution we are feeding into our relationships, we get a reality check in the “till death do us part” business. Personally, I give zero fucks about longevity in its egotistic state. Saying that I’ve been in a relationship with the same woman for thirteen years means nothing but some obnoxious hand claps from the blind in the back of the room. What means

something is how I've spent those thirteen years with her. Has it been a healthy thirteen years? Has it been a happy, healthy, expressive, and creative thirteen years?

Life is torture if the moments that create those years are not created in freedom, peace, and harmony. Many of us struggle with being prisoners to our own relationships. We grant ourselves no freedom; adopt systematic behavior, restrictive rules and beliefs that limit the organic expression of ourselves and our partners. All these limitations provide a false sense of security and reality within our relationships. This is the reality of many of our relationships because it is the reality we adopt for ourselves. We are overwhelmed with sickness, shame, guilt, and judgment. We come to each other broken and void of self-awareness. We continue to feed this emptiness and sickness to ourselves, our relationships, and our children. We then have the audacity to claim health, judge, and degrade one another from this space.

Until we gain the courage to free ourselves from all titles, rules, restrictions, and by-laws created by whoever. Until health and healing on all levels become the fundamental value system in our personal journey, all ambition for long term healthy, happy non-oppressive relationships are fanatical. If our emotional and energetic toxicity does not kill the relationship, our bodies will.

Individual healing and consistent personal development have been the core principles in keeping myself in alignment for my relationship with myself, Ray and my children. Not restriction, not fear, not guilt nor a victim mentality, but a high level of energetic, emotional, spiritual, and physical health. One of my core principles that I teach is that life does not happen to you, it happens through you. I've learned that when I show up for myself, to Ray, and to my children in my healed, healthy, wholeness, I give myself the best chance to co-create experiences that stimulate harmony, peace, and longevity.

Does this void me of challenge? No! We are growing beings, constantly expanding, learning and letting go. Does this make my relationship easy? Yes! Relationships are not difficult, we are! When we decide to be less difficult, to allow ourselves to be honest, organic and expansive, our relationships will

reflect. Remember relationships are nothing but reflections and representations of ourselves in every moment; they are the guiding footprints of our choices, intentions, and level of internal health or lack thereof.

If you and your partner can find the emotional space to understand that if you both do the work within yourselves for yourselves and show up for one another healthy and healed, whatever relationship goals you set an intention for will manifest itself. No need to fantasize about being happy, no need to wait for something, someone, or some idea to come to save you. From that healthy intentional collaborative space, you will co-create whatever it is that you desire from a space of love and peace. You will find your co-creative experience is full of mindfulness and intentional behaviors. Your energy, thoughts, and conversations with one another will become more pleasant. No more waiting for the storm to calm. You find that you have created the calm in the storm. Healing, health, mindfulness, and intention are all powerful tools that we all have at our disposal. Use them!

One of the most powerful tools that I've learned is FORGIVENESS coupled with not taking things so personally. Not every obstacle we've had in the relationship directly had to do with me. Sometimes Ray is dealing with her own shit and in that moment is choosing to project it onto me. I've learned from my experience that sometimes I'm used as an emotional punching bag. A space to let out some steam, a safe space that does not hit back. I struggled with that for a while, and still do at times, whenever I don't have the space to take the licking and keep on ticking. I've asked Ray to ask permission if she recognizes she is in a space that she needs to emotionally let loose from the weight of the world, so I can be prepared.

We all grow at our own space, pace and time. If we are going to choose to be there for one another this means good times and difficult ones. This does not mean allow yourself to be abused. Remember Self-healing and self-development is the foundation. Being emotionally, energetically or physically abused is not part of the regularly scheduled program. If you feel abused in any way cancel that shit. Get out and get away. Hurt people will hurt the healed if we are not careful. Abuse is in no way acceptable. Do not perpetuate it; evacuate it. GET OUT! If you are the abuser, get help and get away. If it's

not abuse but frustration, elevated emotion healing must be applied or there will eventually be a divide due to exhaustion. I have learned to allow her the space for expression of frustration without feeling attacked. A tool I created is to ask, "Am I listening or fixing?" If she says listening then I close my mouth and listen, more times than not, she talks herself through her frustrations. This can be a great learning experience for you. Again, be aware that if it becomes an opportunity to degrade you without resistance, it can quickly turn into emotional abuse. Try it out, but be aware!

I have developed a strong muscle of self-maintenance, self-awareness, and mindfulness by choosing not to force feed Ray, my children nor anyone else my sickness. I chose not to replay my broken history of shit that doesn't fit the future that I desire to grow into. I chose to provide Ray a greater version of me by finding and investing in the resources I need to grow, and from that space I allow her to grow, expand, express, and be her authentic self. These moments of health, of intention, of forgiveness, of healing, are what creates longevity. We've created a space that feels good and decided to stick around for as long as we choose. That's My Word!

6

NAME: MIKE DORSEY

IG HANDLE: @I_AM_MIKEDORSEY&
@BLACKFATHERSNOW

AGE: 39 (BIRTHDAY IS 11/15/79 SO I'LL BE 40 IF
THIS IS RELEASED AFTER THAT DATE)

How long have you been married?

It will be 10yrs on 7/18/2019.

Why did you get married and/or entered into a long-term relationship?

I always had the desire to get married. It was never an “if” but always a “When” and “With Who”. I grew up in a household with both of my parents. Though their relationship wasn’t perfect, they were and still are married. Both sets of my grandparents were married until death. When I was born, I had all but 3 of my Great-Grandparents still alive...and they were all married. Again, their relationships were NOT perfect...but they were married nonetheless. That informed me on a subconscious level of the ultimate importance of the divine order and importance of having a strong family unit that is built on marriage. That was something that I always desired.

Why did you ask your wife to marry/ be with you?

Quite simply, she was the one! We were actually hooked up by my Godmother and had a long distance relationship for the entirety of our dating experience. Courtesy of being a few states away and not having the opportunity to be with each other physically on a regular basis, we were forced to learn how to communicate with each other verbally...That was all that we had. Mind you, this was before online dating, facetime, Skype, or any other communication service that allowed you to connect as easily as we can do now with smartphones. That lack of physical interaction sucked at times but it also served as a blessing in disguise. The ability to talk and listen to each other allowed an intimate closeness that we may not have developed if not forced into it due to circumstance. After a short time of in-depth communication with my girl...I knew this was something special. After 3 ½ years of long distance dating, we got married!

How do you get past the hard times and/or resolve conflict and issues within your marriage?

OVERCOMMUNICATE! Don't leave ANYTHING to chance, Communicate. If you are like me and naturally non-confrontational, you tend to let things roll off your back and let things slide.

But that leads to a big issue! I inadvertently allowed small things to build up to a Big Thing and then BOOM...an argument happens. You are going to have issues, disagreements, and arguments...You ARE! The biggest thing is realizing the big picture in every disagreement. Lots of folks who are newly married aren't used to the concept of having to work through tough issues. When you're simply dating, when things get too hot, you always have an out because you aren't "legally" tied together. Some of us used that mindset as leverage in our non-marital relationships. But when you're married, you can't (or at least shouldn't) run...you've got to work through it. So approach EVERY issue with the big picture in mind. That big picture should revolve around, "How do we move forward with the best interests of our strong and thriving family unit in mind?" As long as we keep the success of our family unit (Mom, Dad, Kids, etc.) in mind at all times, it helps to really prioritize things and minimize unnecessary drama and heartache.

General marriage advice for brothers:

Marriage to the Right Woman is Dope! The right woman will add exponential value to who you already are as well as gain exponential value from what you bring to the table. But, don't be in a rush! Take your time! Take time to fully understand WHO YOU AUTHENTICALLY ARE before you bring another person into your world. You must understand your personal value before anyone can come into the mix and "add value". Make sure to ask lots of questions and get to know them on levels that are not just physical. I would highly encourage you to connect with a woman who has similar spiritual beliefs as you as this tends to give you an understanding of your potential spouse's moral compass. Before marriage make sure you are on the same page regarding kids, money and lifestyle aspirations. Understand, that you also don't just marry a person...You marry a Family!

I know folks come from various backgrounds and situations, but try your best to spend time with your potential spouse's family and circle of influence. Sometimes, a lot can be learned by paying attention to the environments and people that your potential spouse is connected to.

GET Pre-Marital Counseling! Realize that like YOU, nobody is going to be perfect. But I'll tell you this, I heard a friend communicate how he knew that his lady was "the one". He basically said that once he came to the conclusion that he was comfortable and at peace with his Girlfriend surpassing his Mother as the most important Woman in his life, he knew she was THE ONE. So, for me, that's the litmus test. As a self-proclaimed "momma's boy", once I was at peace and comfortable with my girl replacing my mother as the most important lady in my life; I knew it was Time! So brothers, until you're ready for "your girl" to unseat "your mother" with the #1 spot...slow down and continue to grow!

Peace and Blessings!

NAME: SHANNON STEWART

IG HANDLE: SSMINISTRIES

AGE: 42 AT THE TIME OF RELEASE

How long have you been married?

14 years, 2/19/05

Why did you get married and/or entered into a long-term relationship?

When you know you've found the right one, you just know. My life's desire was to mirror some of the things I saw growing up: To have someone to share life with while having a desire to be a father. From a spiritual perspective, I believe God's best resides in companionship and being with someone.

Why did you ask your wife to marry/be with you?

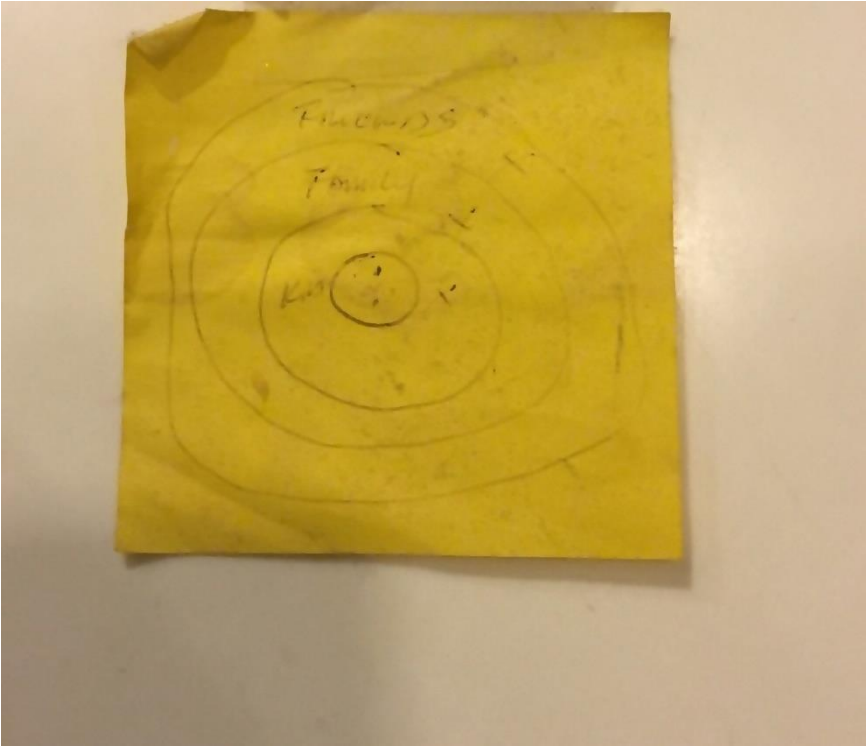
As I said earlier when you know, you know. I was in the process of being offered a job that would cause me to relocate and I couldn't imagine doing life without my now wife. At that point, I had a decision to make and many years later I'm confident I made the right one. I will say this is how you know, "When you can't imagine not sharing life's moments good and bad

with a person, that's the right person.”

General marriage advice for brothers:

Communicate and when you think you've communicated enough, communicate some more. Also, we took advantage of pre-marital counseling which helped immensely by allowing us to talk over a few things prior to marriage. Also, it's not "if" you encounter tough times it's "when". As the primary earner in our household, I was laid off three months into our marriage and spent 14 of our first 24 months married, out of work. We were able to band together and my wife not only supported my search for work but supported every hustle and odd job I did to bring in income.

Marriage is a covenant and not a contract. A contract is something that can be invalidated if any breach of terms occurs. A covenant is something that is bound by life and death, and which one would rather die than to infringe on the terms of the covenant. Marriage is work and it's this fact that continues to push me to make marriage a success. Furthermore, marriage is a partnership, not two (2) sole proprietor ventures and as a result, must be treated as such. Brothers, you and your wife are each other's top priority; kids, relatives, and friends cannot slow your growth together. This is a picture of a drawing that has rested on our refrigerator since we got married. We've carried it from apartment to house and the picture is simple. There are three dots in the circle; those dots represent GOD-HUSBAND-WIFE, though there are things outside of that circle, nothing gets into that circle because it is impenetrable. My advice above all things is to protect your circle.



8

NAME: VILARD “TIGER” TOLEDO

IG HANDLE: @TIGER.TOLEDO

AGE: 43 (BIRTHDAY IS 11/25/75)

How long have you been married?

It will be 13yrs on 4/22/2020.

Why did you get married and/or entered into a long term relationship?

I'm going to give you the Good, Bad, and the Ugly. Walk with me... I got in a long term relationship with my wife because she held me up when I was down and almost homeless. Everybody loves you when you're doing good but when things get thick and spiral out of control, it's then that you discover who your true Ride-or-Die team is.

We had only been dating a few months when my roommate and former close friend of 10 years bought the building me and one other roommate was living in. For some reason, he decided not to give us a heads up that he was buying the building and planned to immediately rehabilitate the property.

We were close friends for over 10 years already so the least the homie could have done was give us a heads up. Two-days after the deal went through, rehabbers began sled-hammering the apartment. Debris, dust, and crap was everywhere; it became uninhabitable. I had a few racks to get another spot but my credit was sh*t so I was getting denied often.

With the bathroom demolished by the rehabbers and nowhere else to go, I finally humbled myself and asked my girlfriend if I could crash with her till I get my credit right. She was going against her cardinal rule of “NO live-in boyfriends”. She also went against her parents and siblings wishes, and still agreed to do it.

It was at that point I knew she was the one for me. You see, where I come from in Brooklyn, NY, she is called a “Ride-or-Die”, and if you're lucky enough to find one, you keep her.

Why did you ask your wife to marry/be with you?

What is Understood Need Not Be Mentioned...? Neither one of us proposed to each other. After one year together she became pregnant. I already knew I wanted to be with her for the rest of my life and I'd like to say she felt the same. So a few months later we made it official.

I know, I know, you're probably saying that's no reason to tie the knot with someone and you are 100% right. But when you plan to go hard for each other despite all the chaos, calamities, and hardships no matter what... there's nothing left to say but “I DO”.

How do you get past the hard times and/or resolve conflict and issues within your marriage?

Patience and understanding. You see, she grew up in a two family household with both parents married. I grew up in a single mother household with a good father who visited me every weekend.

To my surprise, there is a big difference. Majority of the men in my family including my pops were smooth talking, playeristic womanizers. So inherently I adopted a lot of their ways. I was able to get women to put up

with my b.s for a long time. I broke their confidence and manipulated their self-esteem. But when I got with my wife I couldn't break her.

(Locker Room Talk)

Let's keep it 100 fellas. If a chick gives us an inch, you know damn right we're going to take a mile. That's the nature of the beast. But my wife wasn't having it, which was frustrating yet very attractive.

Here's the deal... I analyzed the situation and realized that most of the ladies I kicked it with came from broken homes like me, therefore, there was a strong male presence absent. They lacked that element in their confidence which made it easy for a playa like me to get away with bloody murder.

It took me a minute to come to grips with that and it was then I developed more patience and understanding. I sought to understand why she was the way she was. If we have an argument sure we go after each other throats but when the ego subsides and "time" does its wonderful job of clearing up the smoke, we take the time to understand what angle the other is coming from and its validity. What can we do to alleviate some of the pressure the other is going through?

Is it easy? HELL NO!!! But that's why patience and understanding are so important. You don't want to be that bitter old dude in the club who is divorced from his soulmate because of ego, arrogance, and stubbornness. Time Heals, Understanding Reveals.

General marriage advice for brothers:

Write down all the ideal attributes and values you want in a wife.

I had three pages of this written down and when we wedded I found that journal a few years later and shared it with my wife. She knocked down 93% of that list.

You see, I knew exactly what I wanted in a long-term partner and wife before I met her. Most importantly, I knew exactly what I didn't want in a

wife. This made the elimination process so much easier.

So in order to know who you can pour your entire self into, you must first know self.

9

NAME: TREVOR CASSABERRY

OWNER OF CASSABERRY CONSULTING LLC

IG HANDLE: @DON_TREVOLTA;

@CASSABERRYCONSULTING

AGE: 26

How long have you been married?

2 years

Why did you get married and/or entered a long-term relationship?

I've been with my wife since we were in high school. She was the captain of the Hip-Hop Dance Team "Urban DVD." I was the captain of the boys

Step Team “United Brothers” and co-captain of the Boys Basketball Team. We attended different colleges, mine in Ohio and hers in Pennsylvania, and after one week we knew we wanted to stay together instead of giving in to the pressures of being single in college. We worked at staying together through a long-distance relationship, although we spent time together during breaks, for six years. We encouraged each other and helped one another earn our degrees (my Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering & her Bachelor of Arts in English) which was far from the experience many of our friends had. Many of them allowed their relationship to interfere with their studies or allow their studies to diminish their relationship. We knew after finishing college that we would stay together, and we made our union official with our families in 2017.

Why did you ask your wife to marry/be with you?

My wife, Akosua Nyantakyi, is a beautiful soul with a gorgeous body and personality. She was very shy when we met in high school. As soft-spoken as she was, she showed so much charisma when she was performing on stage. She was the first woman to challenge my thoughts on an intimate level. As our relationship furthered, we watched each other grow into the man and woman that we are today. After we completed college, I knew that there was no person that knew me to the same depths that she did. I decided that I did not want a new woman, because it would take another seven years to find out if she could love me the way Akosua did by that time. I also knew that no matter who it was, I would have compared everything about our relationship to what I had already built with Akosua.

Lastly, I knew that Akosua was well beyond the “average” woman, regarding what I wanted and needed to make a woman my wife. These confirmations made it a very easy choice to take Akosua’s hand in marriage and create our amazing daughter, Madison.

How do you get past the hard times and/or resolve conflict and issues within your marriage?

My wife and I stress communication. Whenever I feel upset about something or if it seems my wife is not her usual self, I ask if she would like

to talk about it right away. If not, I am sure to ask again either before we go to bed or when we wake up the next morning. There were days I called out of work to stay home and work on our marriage. I grew up in a home that displayed countless examples of an unhealthy marriage. Almost every example stemmed from a lack of communication and I vowed to never allow that to happen in my own marriage. We must speak out our disagreements as early as possible to avoid time letting it fester, as long as we both are ready and willing to talk. I've learned that no matter how "soft" I push, I cannot force my wife to speak out on issues before she is ready. Lastly, during those conversations, I am diligent about keeping tensions low. I ensure my wife knows what my intentions are before I make a point that may come across harsh or can be taken out of context. As we consistently work at it, it becomes less frequent and easier to manage.

General marriage advice for brothers:

Communication

You and your wife MUST discuss your plans before they are made. The understanding of one another is more important than the agreement, but you will have to make a decision that you both are comfortable with. Even though one of you might be the one leading a decision, you both will reap the benefits and/or errors of each decision. Communication is the #1 Key to a successful marriage and every positive relationship.

When communicating with your wife, you need to understand her full thought process and explain yours. Your wife should have a deep understanding of your way of thinking and stance on various topics, as you should understand hers. You and your wife are a representation of one another, and you both will need the ability to make decisions that correspond with the stances you make as a team. The purpose of Communication is to gain understanding.

Miscommunication is inevitable; it will never have lasting effects lack of communication. You and you wife will both have to take blame for a

miscommunication, but lack of communication will always fall on the silent/distant spouse. If you feel or notice a lack of communication from your wife, you need to discuss it with her (and vice versa). If you don't, then you both will be practicing a lack of communication.

Affection

You need to show your wife affection, especially in a society that puts and makes women's needs a secondary thought. She may want it verbally, physically, and/or emotionally. Tell your wife how much you love her and how much you are attracted to her. Touch/Hold her while you are telling her and follow up with how you are emotionally invested into her.

Affection can be displayed in private or in public. Display affection when expected but also when your wife does not expect it. She will appreciate it when she expects it, but she will always remember the affectionate surprises. You have chosen this woman to become one entity with, so anytime you embrace her with affection, you embrace the entity that is your union under the Highest.

There is a stigma in our community that prevents many of our Kings from accepting verbal and/or emotional displays of affection from our Kweens. The only way for your affection to be truly genuine is if you are willing to accept her affection in return. That is the difference between genuine affection and a "pick-up line." Embrace the affection your wife has shown you, is showing you, and continues to show you. It is her way of showing the utmost appreciation for your displays of affection.

Consistency

Consistent behavior is how we learn our wives and how they learn us. You tend to naturally become more consistent when you understand what your wife wants, needs, and expects from you. The one issue that may occur is complacency. The key to keeping consistency from becoming complacency is to consistently practice the betterment of your relationship.

You must consistently work on bettering yourself, as it will strengthen your union, and inspire your wife and children. You must consistently work on bettering your understanding of your wife and children,

as it will strengthen your bond with them and their trust/ belief in you. Consistently challenge your wife, and if you have them, children, to better themselves. As they begin to consistently complete challenges, their confidence will increase. This will cause you all to challenge each other to be great while also increasing the support system that is the home.

Consistency takes discipline. That is because it must be present through the best and worst of times. You will need to be consistent in your communication, affection, and efforts to better yourself. These are the three keys to how I've been able to sustain a healthy marriage.

I'VE MESSED UP! WHAT DO I DO NOW? AND WHAT SHOULDN'T I DO NOW?

Name: Brandon Reed

Best responses when you've messed up or are arguing in your relationship:

1-Take time to cool off and gather yourself BEFORE interacting with your lady. When you are emotional, rarely do you have the ability to operate from a place of rational thought.

2-If you've screwed up...OWN IT! When you OWN IT you have the ability to control the narrative and make sure things are rooted in the Truth and not speculation.

3-When arguing, don't always feel the need to win.

Worst responses when you've messed up or are arguing in your relationship:

1-NEVER allow things to get physical. The worst thing you can do is to initiate or allow any type of physical altercation to happen between you and your spouse.

2-I know it's hard, but Don't Lie!!! The worst thing you can do is to Lie. One lie births another, and so on and so on...

3-Never initiate arguing when in a setting with an audience. When there are onlookers sometimes, it tends to cause the intensity to increase which also adds to the embarrassment factor. When folks feel like they're getting embarrassed, they'll go to great lengths to make sure you're just as

embarrassed as they are. Try your best to address issues and handle disagreements in private.

BONUS: DO NOT AIR YOUR DIRTY LAUNDRY A.K.A. Personal Relationship Business on SOCIAL MEDIA!!!! 95% of folks don't care about what's going on in your bedroom and the other 5% just want to be nosey

!

NAME: CHRIS JOHNSON

3 things to do when you mess up:

Firstly, when you mess up, the best thing to do is think it through. Determine the damage, the overall cost, and consequences. When you have a grasp on these matters and can explain them with tact and you also have a solution-oriented posture, then you should proceed to talk with your spouse. Otherwise, get your thoughts together beforehand and do not talk until you can explain it succinctly. A man's job in a marriage or long-term relationship is to protect and provide. If you have, through your very own foolish decisions, mismanaged your life or had a lapse of mental acuity which caused you to go astray and breach your duties as a man, then you do not want to cause further damage by introducing additional fear. Remember, as a protector if you introduce more fear, you are not protecting to the best of your ability.

Secondly, when you mess up if the argument goes from cute baby cub mumbling to all-out grizzly bear with growling and clawing, it is incumbent upon you to remain calm. The best way to deal with highly charged emotional outbursts is to have a plan for dealing with them way before they start. For example, I have two rules in dealing with arguments that my wife and I adhere to.

Rule #1: Do not argue in front of the kids or in public. All spats or innocent conversations that can potentially grow from small controlled discussions to uncontrollable full-blown arguments need to be handled in private. I am a leader both privately and publicly, so any spat that may tarnish the aspects of my leadership presence should be avoided (if at all possible).

Rule #2: If the argument gets too heated, we both have a right to let the other person know that we are too emotional and cannot continue the discussion but will be available--just state a reasonable timeframe. This creates healthy boundaries for managing emotions and the ensuing damage that could arise if emotions are not handled with great care and proactive planning.

Thirdly, if you mess up, you gotta let your pride go and humble yourself. As men we have a tendency to misinterpret pride for strength, however, the opposite is true. Humility gives you strength. The acknowledgment of weakness can give a man great strength. What does humility look like? It can take the form of an apology. I do not mean, saying, "I'm sorry." That is a general and one-sided negotiation. It is better to ask your spouse, "Do you forgive me for <state the grievance in detail>?" The most important word in this suggested script is the word forgive, the bridge is stating the exact wrong so that it is not sugar coated to protect the guilty--this is specific and a two-sided negotiation. Apologizing in this manner gives the person who was harmed the right to accept or reject your humble stance towards reconciliation.

3 things to avoid when you mess up:

Firstly, when you mess up the first thing you should avoid is hiding the wrongdoing. It is okay to take time and flesh out an approach, but hiding it like a cat hides its poop is downright deceiving and will amplify the damage once the poop is discovered. Own your own work. I know of people who have had children due to an affair early in the marriage and when the child turned eighteen they decided to tell their spouse. That was not the wisest choice. A big part of growing together in a long-term relationship is trust; if you mess with trust you could very well end the relationship. Some people cannot move forward if trust has been breached or damaged beyond repair.

Secondly, if you have messed up, you should avoid sharing your thoughts with friends and family. Think about it, casual discussions (i.e. about entertainment or sports) with family and friends can easily be misunderstood, and these are not emotionally charged topics. If family and friends can misunderstand casual conversations dealing with trivial matters, they can unintentionally cause your campfire to turn into a forest fire. If you need to talk to someone about an indiscretion, you should find a mentor, pastor, coach, or trusted counselor who is equipped to give wise advice and maintain confidentiality. And if you are against finding a trusted coach or advisor, you will soon learn, successful leaders do not move forward without wise counsel.

Thirdly, if you have messed up, avoid defining or giving your unsolicited view of the damage you have caused to your spouse. At this point, you have caused the damage, so it is best that you do not hire yourself as the lead investigator for your relationships accident reconstruction team. This is because you may be biased in your assessment and reporting. Therefore, if

you hurt your spouse by messing up, just keep quiet or ask questions to ascertain the extent of your damage. Be aware: We all have blind spots and you do not want to have a strong opinion about the damage caused or how your spouse should feel or respond to the ensuing circumstances you created.

NAME: LEX KELLY

Andre asked me to provide three things I do when I “mess up” and three things not to do when “I mess up”.

I’ll do my best since I usually don’t know I messed up until “The talk” or the energy shifts.

1. I show up open and honest and try my best to understand the concern. My relationship conflicts tend to be more about differences in perspective rather than me “messaging up”. I’ve also found that often times the real concern is not so cookie cut and clear. Sometimes it’s layered so,
2. I show up with the right energy space and subside my ego. Naturally, I want to figure this shit out, which is why having my emotions in check helps me know what is really going on.
3. I forgive myself. Dwelling in the conflict and beating myself up is not good for anyone. I learn my lesson, address the problem, apologize for the experience, and then forgive myself.

Three things I don’t do!

1. Shut down, avoid, or bully my way out of the situation. Emotional maturity is a must. Do the personal development and healing needed to address life and relationship when shit gets tough.
2. I don’t leave it open-ended! I attempt to make her feel secure that this will not be a repeat offense. Again if my goal is to nurture the relationship and elevate it. Leaving things fucked up ain’t it.
3. I don’t deflect and pass it off as “Oh she trippin”. Self-reflection is a bitch and part of being a man is taking the bite.

NAME: SHANNON STEWART

3 things to do when you mess up:

1. Admit it

- Accountability is key when it comes to building trust and sustaining. I had a horrible habit of saying “I’m sorry you feel that way” whenever my wife was upset. And one day she said, “WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, that’s not an apology”. I realized this was not a way for me to take responsibility for my actions.

2. Remember why you love each other

- Recently a couple I know put out a Facebook post saying they were getting divorced and they had simply grown apart. WHAT? This was the craziest thing I ever heard. They’d forgotten why they fell in love or maybe they rushed and were not in love in the first place.

3. Most things aren’t as bad as they seem.

- Things are usually not as bad as they seem. Make a point to make light of the situation. I frequently tell my wife when we’re at odds with each other, “There’s nothing you can do to make me stop loving you”. It usually breaks the tension and allows us to regroup.

3 things “NOT” to do when you mess up:

1. Forgetting you’re the leader

- In this world of gender equality and role reversals, it can be easy to forget that YOU ARE THE MAN. As a result, you are the leader of your household in every facet and that includes emotionally. Be a stable place in the midst of disagreement.

2. Talk more than you listen:

- It's easy to listen with the purpose of responding. Make a point to listen; developing this habit early in your marriage is key.
3. Escapings
- I often fell and fall into this trap when things get rough, I tend to try to escape and get away (with hopes it'll go away). This is by far one of the worst things to do. Avoid the "David Blaine" tactic at all cost.

NAME: VILARD "TIGER" TOLEDO

3 best things to do when you mess up.

1. Humble yourself and own your loss.
2. Having a peaceful home is better than bragging rights for winning an argument.
3. Splurge on your Queen. If anybody deserves to be treated like royalty, it's your Mom and your wife.

3 worst things to do when you mess up.

1. Don't get into a shouting fest. Let the other party vent their feelings and frustration entirely without interruption. They'll eventually run out of steam.
2. Don't shut down. You will only anger your partner and make them feel insecure about your relationship.
3. Don't pull outsiders into your argument to prove your case. My wife and I both did this in the early stages of our marriage and it resulted in a one-year separation. Keep direct external opinions out. Both of you are smart; you guys will figure it out.

I hope this helps you in your journey young leader. I wish you the best.

Peace, Love, and Prosperity to you and yours!

*Tiger Toledo

NAME: TREVOR CASSABERRY

Top 3 things to do:

1. I admit that I understand that I messed up and why I messed up.
2. I have a follow-up discussion to find a potential solution to the issue that caused me to mess up.
3. I spend more time at home to give her complete accessibility to me.

Worst 3 things to do:

1. I've learned NOT to leave and avoid contact after I mess up.
2. I've learned NOT to use sex to avoid discussion and apologizing after I mess up.
3. I've learned NOT to discuss my relationship with other people before I've discussed it to completion with my wife.

NAME: MIKE DORSEY

Best Responses when you've messed up or you're arguing in your relationship:

1-Take time to Cool off and gather yourself BEFORE interacting with your lady. When you are emotional, rarely do you have the ability to operate from a place of rational thought.

2-If you've screwed up...OWN IT! When you OWN IT you have the ability to control the narrative and make sure things are rooted in the Truth and not speculation.

3-When arguing, don't always feel the need to win.

Worst Responses when you've messed up or you're arguing in your relationship:

1-NEVER allow things to get physical. The worst thing you can do is to initiate or allow any type of physical altercation to happen between you and your spouse.

2-I know it's hard, but Don't Lie!!! The Worst thing you can do is to Lie. One lie births another, and so on and so on...

3-Never initiate arguing when in a setting in which you have an audience. When there are onlookers sometimes that tends to cause the intensity to increase which also adds to the embarrassment factor. When folks feel like they're getting embarrassed, they'll go to great lengths to make sure you're just as embarrassed as they are. Try your best to address issues and handle disagreements in private.

BONUS: Do NOT AIR YOUR DIRTY LAUNDRY A.K.A. Personal Relationship Business on SOCIAL MEDIA!!!! 95% of folks don't care about what's going on in your bedroom and the other 5% just want to be nosey!

OUTRO

Us as men tend to not share enough with others about our challenges.

Join a marriage disunion or accountability group where you can talk your thoughts out with other men. I would recommend meeting at least twice a month.

Marriage maintenance

Ask her these questions on a regular basis:

How are you feeling about this relationship?

What can I do to make you a more fulfilled lady?

Write down her good and great qualities below

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....
- 6.....
- 7.....
- 8.....
- 9.....
- 10.....

Keep these things in mind at all times. When things are good and not so great.

The 24-hour rule - You say nothing that can cause permanent damage for the least damage.

Premarital counseling is a MUST!!!

But also include ongoing, consistent marriage maintenance!

Resource Guide:

We have put together some resources for Black Men to provide ongoing relationship support.

Go to AndresInstitute.com

Lex Kelly is an amazing healer, conflict resolution strategist, personal development expert, and relationship coach.

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You can order this book and our other book at BlackMarriagePrep.com

Please order Mike Dorsey's book available on Amazon:

Dynamic Black Fatherhood Manifesto: A Commitment to Excellence in Life, Fatherhood and the Support of Dynamic Black Men

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andre is a nationally acclaimed entrepreneur and philanthropist. Andre is the owner of The Black Real Estate School, Andre's Notary School, The Notary Business School and co-founder of Buy Black NYC. Known as "Mr. Buy Black," Andre is the driving force behind the national Black Business Challenge social media campaign that encourages African-Americans to patronize Black-owned businesses, record feedback about their experience via their cell phone, and then post the footage online using the #BlackBusinessChallenge hashtag. The campaign, which was initially planned for 30 days but has increased to 395 days, garnered the attention of media outlets and sparked mass appeal in Black economics.