



DEAR DR

HARTMAN

Going One-Up

Hello patients, It is a well-established scientific fact that every long-term sexual relationship is based on an intense power struggle. The cut and thrust of this struggle provides the all-important sexual tension which stimulates the partners to sexual activity even after a long day at the office and a tribe of fighting kids over dinner.

Clearly, it would not be possible to maintain psycho-sexual activity between the sheets without this vital tension created by the fundamental power struggle at the heart of human relationships. However, many couples waste hours of precious time 'negotiating' in an endless process of monitoring who is currently 'on top' in their dynamic struggle. This process of verbal negotiation and assessment to see who is 'in the good books' can be exhausting. Basically, after five, ten, or fifteen years, a couple may get tired of discussing similar things over and over again.

It is for this reason that I have developed the Points System at my clinic. It is a psycho-sexual accounting technique for couples who are in for the long haul in their relationship. The Points System offers a shorthand way of mapping the ebb and flow of dominance and submission within the ecosystem of your partnership.

Let me illustrate the process with an example. The single greatest source of tension for most couples is work. Any job is bad enough in this respect but when both members of the couple are employed in jobs which offer a sense of meaning and purpose, as well as money, then you really get problems. The trouble arises because these people both actually *want* to work longer hours.

They want to go to public meetings at night. They want to redraft vital documents on weekends. The list is endless and I'm sure most of you can add to it from your own experience. If ideas about social justice can be squeezed into your job description, then you've entered a big black hole that can swallow hours of your life.

Many couples have spent years battling over this issue. Quite simply, work interferes with child rearing, shopping, washing, vacuuming, dog walking, car servicing, holiday taking, sex and fun (to name just a few fundamental activities). As one of my patients always says "Relationships are an activity that you do together. But how can we *do* anything when she is always at work?"

My Points System saved this patient's intimate encounter with a significant other (or, as we used to say, his marriage). Instead of wasting precious hours in recriminations and negotiations over who had to do what, all caused by extra hours spent at work, they simply began to award and deduct points.

If you stay at work until 8 pm, leaving your partner to cook the dinner and feed the dogs, then you lose points and you have to make them up in some other way. You may bring tea and toast on a tray the next morning, or go to the supermarket alone the next weekend. You don't have to renegotiate old ground. You simply know where you stand in numerical terms.

The really big advantage of this system is that the best way to make up lost points is to do something really

nice that will give the other person pleasure. When the Points System is really working you stop nagging at each other and actually do nice things together.

Of course, the more heinous the crime, the more points you lose, and the more you have to do to retain ground in the 'ledger of life'. I know one chap who is the human equivalent of the Mexican economy. His partner is an independent feminist with her own substantial income who had a baby to please him. He then got a job he really wanted interstate and left her for three months with a bottle in one hand, a nappy in the other, and a very sad look on her face.

Quite simply, this man's points ledger makes the Australian balance of payments look good. To regain lost ground he is looking at perhaps a surprise trip to Venice with quality child care arranged in Italy, or offering to stay at home full-time for three months on his return.

The only way someone could lose more points than this chap is by committing adultery. Now I know some of the readers of this magazine may take exception to the use of the word 'adultery'. You filled your minds with so much poppycock about 'open relationships' in the 70s and you still don't like to call a spade a spade.

But God didn't mince words when he sent his bureaucrat Moses up to the top of that mountain to get the ultimate policy document. He wrote that Ten Point Mission Statement on stone so that fast-talking lobbyists wouldn't be able to water it down.

Whether you like it or not, if you commit adultery, you'll be making up points for years to come. But if that means taking your partner on really exciting foreign holidays for a decade, at least the process of reconstruction can be pleasurable.

*Send your problems to Dr
Hartman's secretary, Julie
McCrossin, CI- ALR.*