

THE INTERNATIONAL  
BESTSELLING SERIES

THE  
RULES  
OF  
LOVE

RICHARD TEMPLAR

doing something you don't understand or not doing things the way you think they should be done.

But neither should you dwell on the differences. If there's any dwelling to be done, it should be on the things you have in common. The shared passions and interests. The delight you both take in walking in the rain, in playing Scrabble or watching nature documentaries or going to the pub to see your friends or whatever it is.

Yes, it really helps if you can share certain things – views of raising children, and some hobbies and interests, for example – and those things you should cherish, but differences are healthy. Even if they do drive you up the wall sometimes.

**THE BEST TEAMS CONTAIN  
PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT  
STRENGTHS**

# Don't belittle your partner

This is so sad, and I bet you know people who do it. I certainly do. Know people who do it, that is. I don't do it – I think it's a terrible thing. They put their partner down in front of other people, belittle them, make them feel small. You wonder what they're doing with that person if they think so little of them, although I'm not sure that what they say is really what they're thinking. They just derive some kind of pleasure from humiliating their partner. I've known some people do it in a big way and others in a small way. I've known people do it just occasionally because they're angry with their partner over some petty argument.

This is not the way to behave. Not towards anyone and especially, *especially* not towards your partner. Even if you're angry with them, you never air your dirty linen in public. If you can't restrain yourself in front of other people, stay home and sort the problem out. But actually, you should be able to restrain yourself. What kind of perverted mind derives pleasure or satisfaction from making the person they love feel bad and look bad?

It's very simple. Under absolutely no circumstances is it acceptable to:

- make your partner look a fool
- put your partner down or belittle them
- be rude to them
- tell jokes at their expense
- discuss their shortcomings

You shouldn't be doing these things in private, and you certainly shouldn't be doing them in front of other people.

I expect professional psychologists will tell you that people who do this feel small, perhaps on account of their partner in some way, and need to build themselves up by putting someone else down. And do you know, I don't care what the reason is. There's no excuse. Maybe there is a deeper problem that needs addressing, so address it. But in the meantime we don't belittle people for any reason at all.

I'm not talking here about affectionate teasing, by the way. I know couples who often affectionately joke about each other and it's an entirely different thing. Both partners are in on the joke and both find it funny, and it's a shared thing that brings them closer. You know perfectly well which camp you're falling into. Don't pretend your partner is enjoying the joke if you know deep down that the comment was barbed and they're only laughing to save face.

The odd thing about putting people down is that the perpetrator always seems to think it makes the victim look bad. But if you've ever witnessed it, you'll know that's not true. It's always the person doing it who looks bad. I know several couples like this and in every case friends think worse of the one who likes to belittle their partner, and more of the other partner for suffering in silence.

**EVEN IF YOU'RE ANGRY WITH  
THEM, YOU NEVER AIR YOUR  
DIRTY LINEN IN PUBLIC**

# You want to do what?

You've already agreed to give your partner the space to be themselves (see Rule 23).<sup>\*</sup> That's because you thought they wanted an evening with their best mate, or to branch off into a different aspect of stamp collecting, or to fiddle about with their camera.

Now you discover that their best mate is the opposite sex, or their stamp collecting foray means going away to a convention for a week, or they want to sell the camera and buy a much more expensive one. Or maybe they want to give up their steady job and enrol on a course for two years while you support the family, or take a job that will mean spending a week every month away from home.

Now hang on. That's not what you signed up for when you got yourself into this relationship, is it? Well, yes, I'm afraid it is. Maybe you missed the small print. If you love someone, it's your job to help them fulfil their dreams, ambitions and plans. Even when those plans require extra effort or hardship on your part.

That's not to say you have to support them if they want to sleep with someone else, or to commit some heinous crime. But all the examples above are perfectly reasonable wants and ambitions – they just weren't on your own personal wish list.

However, you can't encourage your partner to fulfil their dreams and be who they want to be unless you support them by being tolerant, enthusiastic, long-suffering if necessary – and resist any temptation to be untrusting, jealous or resentful. I know it can sometimes be difficult, very difficult, but remember that the ultimate reward is a stronger relationship, and that's got to be worth it.

After all, what's the alternative? If you refuse to co-operate, you will be building resentment and dependency, and stifling their

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<sup>\*</sup> I'm assuming you've agreed because you've kept on reading to here

dreams. What kind of a partner would that make you? What sort of a way is that to show your love?

And what if you don't like what they want to do? Well, having established that this Rule doesn't cover infidelity and criminal activity, you need to look at why you're resisting. You're perfectly entitled to express your reservations, and talk them through. It's not unreasonable to be concerned, for example, that if they give up work in order to go back to college, you'll struggle to survive financially. But approach it from the perspective that you want to give them your support and need to talk through exactly how it can be made to work in light of your concerns, rather than putting your foot down and giving a point-blank refusal. At the bottom of it must be your desire to see your partner achieve what they feel is important to them.

**IF YOU REFUSE TO  
CO-OPERATE, YOU WILL BE  
BUILDING RESENTMENT AND  
DEPENDENCY, AND STIFLING  
THEIR DREAMS**

# Let not the sun go down upon your wrath

My mother always used to say this when I was a child, and for some reason I assumed it meant that you shouldn't go to bed angry just in case one of you died in the night. Very over-dramatic of me really, although I've known cases where it has happened. And believe me, if your partner should ever leave this world abruptly during the hours of darkness, the next few years of your life will be hugely affected by the mood you went to bed in. Likewise, every time you see them off at the door, it might be worth considering how you'd feel if they never came back. Sorry, that's very morbid. I don't mean you should fantasise miserably about it on a daily basis, I just mean you should instinctively always part with them as if this were the last time.

But this is also a much more mundane, everyday Rule that doesn't require you to dwell blackly on such depressing things. Pretty much all of us are either sulkers or exploders. So which are you? And if you explode, do you get it all out of your system or do you let it bubble away for hours or even days? We all have different ways of dealing with irritation, frustration and anger, and the way your partner copes with them will influence you too.

It's not healthy to argue constantly in a relationship, but it isn't necessarily a bad thing to have the occasional row – within the boundaries of grown-up behaviour. Rules players never threaten or become abusive, or fling out accusations just to hurt, or allow themselves to come out with things they'll regret later. But within those limits, of course you'll argue from time to time.

But this isn't an argument with a colleague, or a sibling, or someone at a call centre, or a motorist who's just cut you up. This is an argument with the person you love most in all the world, so it's a horrid thing to happen and you need to get it over with as