



Win Every Argument

We argue to get our needs met, and our needs will never be met by arguing.

-- The Author

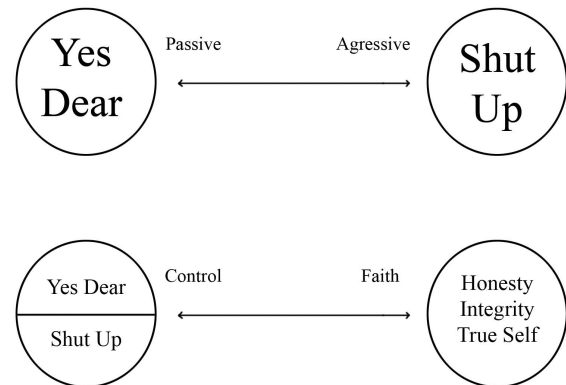
Being right feels wonderful. Life would be so sweet if every time we disagree with our partner they would bow to our superior intellect and admit they are wrong. Since that seldom seems to happen, we learn how to argue, debate, bully, cajole, guilt trip, whine, seduce, deceive, punish and reward the ones we love to get our way. Difference of opinion is not necessarily a bad thing. Conflicts arise in every relationship and expressing our needs is healthy and necessary. A pattern of arguing, though, can be hurtful and damaging to a relationship.

Arguments occur when the needs of one person are in conflict with the needs of another. For example, I think I have mentioned to you many times when you leave the cap off the toothpaste it gets all crusty and gross. You've told me an equal number of times you bought the toothpaste and will put the cap where you like. Who will win this conflict? If the cap goes on, I win and if the cap stays off, you win. If we choose a pattern of argument to settle this conflict, we could fall into using the following unproductive strategies.

The Debate Team Strategy is based on coming up with a devastating logical construct so clever it blows the other person out of the water. *You win and your opponent loses.* Logical arguments work quite well in courtrooms, debate teams or computer programs but are spectacularly unhelpful in nurturing a loving relationship.

The Yes Dear Strategy is used when debating with your partner doesn't work, the next thing we try is to kill our partners with kindness. There is no way she can argue with me if I agree with everything she says. It might keep the peace; but it is a false peace. *It is a passive way to control our partner.*

The Shut Up Strategy When we can't take being fake-nice anymore we try being a bully. We yell, scream, throw things and boss people around (or try to). *This is an aggressive method of control.*



The *Yes Dear* and *Shut Up* strategies seem like they are on opposite ends of the spectrum, and they are on the *Passive / Aggressive* continuum. With both methods, however, we are trying to control the other person. From this perspective, they are two sides of the same controlling coin. It takes an act of faith in yourself and your partner to give up the need to be in control, stand in your integrity, and share your true Self. Many of us feel we have two choices in an argument; give in or stand our ground. It can be liberating to know that there is a third choice: *compassion*.

The Stone Wall Strategy When all else fails, we just stop saying or reacting to anything. We get upset, grit our teeth and bear it, and push it under the surface. This is also known as *emotional cutoff* and is the most dangerous of these strategies. If left unchecked it can be a most serious threat to the relationship. *Total emotional silence kills relationships.*

We win every argument by recognizing we are in old patterns of fear and anger, and stepping out of that pattern. In the past, the most important thing might have been to argue long and loudly until we “win.” How would things change if we recognize *our most important goal is to lovingly connect*? What will take us to this goal; blame and anger or love and compassion? Each disagreement is an opportunity to choose love over anger, leave blame behind and step into compassion. Here are some tools to do just that.

See the Pattern Arguing becomes especially destructive when it becomes a pattern. *You will never step out of a pattern if you don't see you are in one.* Be present and check inside yourself. Is your heart rate and breathing increased? Is your speech loud and rapid? Do you have a closed body position? Do you feel angry or hurt? These are signs you have fallen into the argument pattern again and is the first skill you need to step out of this cycle.

Heart Centered Listening Instead of listening for logic flaws with your critical self, listen for the meaning of the words with your compassionate Self.

Keep on Topic In order to get more ammunition we will often dredge up a laundry list of every slight, insult, and mistake that has ever happened in the relationship. There's time enough later for those past hurts. Stay in the moment. What's present for you right now?

Both Win We are equal partners in this relationship. We are on the same team. If one wins, we both win; and if one of us loses, we both lose. Work on a solution together.

Right and Wrong (Hint: there is no healing in being right or wrong.) We can fall into a pattern of needing to be right at all costs. We can either be right, or we can be loving, but it's impossible to be both.

I'm Upset Because Every argument begins this way, but as long as the conversation stays on this level, the argument never ends. Arguing is a mental sport and the smarter you are, the more likely you are to try to solve everything on the mental level. A loving resolution requires compassion, which comes from the heart, not the head. To be effective, we must move our energy from our head to our heart.

It's Not about the Toothpaste It is almost always true that whatever the topic of your argument, it is not the real *reason* for the argument. You insist on leaving the cap off the toothpaste even though I've told you a thousand times it really bothers me. How could you upset me like this? Of course: *it's not about the toothpaste.* The toothpaste is the trigger and we choose to go into a pattern of upset. The upset points to a hurt place inside we feel needs protecting. Not every argument will be about trivial things like toothpaste. Sometimes we will argue about huge, life-changing things. The same tools apply so practice on the small things.

Exit the Argument and Reconnect When an argument is done, it is done. Successful couples learn how to exit an argument. It's important for us both to have our say and to work on a creative solution together. When the argument is over, reconnect with a smile, a loving touch, or tender look that says *I'm still with you.*

What does this move into compassion look like? In the argument described on the first page, the obvious issue is whether the cap is on the toothpaste or not. That seems trivial, but this is only the tip of the iceberg of what's going on. The larger issues are: Do you value our beautiful home? Do you value my opinion? Do you still love and want to have a life with me? These questions are *not* trivial; they are deep and complicated. In fact, it is much easier for me to pick a fight about toothpaste rather than face these deeper issues.

These issues take faith, courage, and compassion and are the path to loving connection.

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass the world is too full to talk about.
— Jalaluddin Mevlana Rumi - مولوی*