

## **Hooked On Recovery**

February 16, 2007

*Of Hedgehogs and Rhinos*

*“A defense that all species of hedgehogs possess is the ability to roll into a tight ball, causing all of the spines to point outwards.” –Wikipedia*

*“A powerful rhinoceros, though herbivorous, is arguably one of the deadliest creatures on earth to humans.” –Wikipedia*

Speaking engagements have taken me before many a different crowd over the last several years, none more interesting than this past Tuesday. I stood before a women’s group at our family’s church. Sandy and I were going to talk about marriage, our marriage. I left my coat on so no one would see me sweat.

Sandy had signed us up about six months earlier and I had heartily agreed. Again, I fell for the deception that the engagement was far enough way that we’d have plenty of time to prepare. Yet, no matter how far away I schedule something, it eventually shows up. I also thought that Sandy and I could do something together, something that was really meaningful to us, that we would have fun designing and collaborating and oh wouldn’t everything be hunky-dory. So guess when Sandy and I finally decided on what we’d do? That’s right, the night before. But that came after two or three days of on-again, off-again frosty stares and icy discussion. For a few days there was no joy in Mudville.

Sandy’s a project leader, I’m a project leader. I thought she had the lead on this project, she thought we would collaborate. I missed the boat. Every time, she would bring it up, I would dive into my man-cave. My rationale was that I had so much going on that I didn’t want to deal with this, so I didn’t. She graciously offered me a way out of doing it all together, but I knew that wasn’t the right thing to do. The right thing was for me to work it out with my wife. Let your yes mean yes and your no mean no.

We agreed on an outline that Sandy wrote and we agreed to alternate between PowerPoint slides. She typed out her pieces, I worked from brief notes. Once we started, it was quite enjoyable. We talked about our marriage honestly. We talked about our struggle preparing. We kept it real. Most satisfying and heartwarming was that several of the ladies commented on how our love for each other shone through all we said. We based our talk on The Marriage Course\*, an incredibly practical 8-week session to improve and enhance any marriage. Sandy and I shared the slides and I drew the one on Conflict Resolution. When we went through the course ourselves, I was particularly struck by two simple but powerful concepts. The first had to deal with resolving an issue. Often a couple will put the issue between them and defend their side. Nothing gets resolved. They suggested sitting on a couch together and putting the issue out in front and work together to solve it. A simple shift in our perspective changed our attitude. It’s no longer about winning, it’s about solving. It’s about teamwork.

My sponsor consistently asks, “Would you rather be happy, or right?”

The second concept had to do with two natural responses to conflict: two ways most people are wired. When facing conflict one might assume the hedgehog position; curl into a ball and let

your enemy fall on your quills. I've been wired like a hedgehog. I have a lot of experience with the hedgehog response; Sandy is wired that way too and my three oldest children too. The jury is still out on Matthew and Mary. My parents are wired that way too. When two hedgehogs pair up and conflict arises it can get pretty quiet. Icy is a good word. Now that Sandy and I are aware of our tendency, we work on talking more, on coming out of our defensive positions and dealing more aggressively with the conflict. It works. I can not relate to the other natural response to conflict, the same response as the rhino – charge! Boy was I surprised when I asked this group of 40 or so women, how many thought they were rhinos and about 70% raised their hands! Frankly, when I experience aggressive behavior, or anger, or someone's attack mode, I want to... well, curl up in a ball and let my quills do the talking. This helped shed some light on some couples I know. For example, what happens when a rhino is paired with a hedgehog? Or two rhinos get together? Maybe that's why a group of rhinos is called a "crash".

Through this exercise, I discovered my hedgehog wiring. In a lot of ways, I see that this posture helped to feed my addiction. I have this natural tendency to flee, to escape, to hide. That's still my first response when under pressure. Recovery, and maybe some plain old maturity, has helped me balance this reaction. I'm not as quick to retreat. I've learned to stand, sometimes to stand firm. In recent years, I've even charged once or twice. I must admit it was somewhat liberating.

So, I finished my piece on resolving conflict. Sandy drew the next slide on, of all things, Good Sex. My hedgehog wiring kicked in spontaneously and I retreated behind the screen. I couldn't help myself. The ladies thought it was quite funny. Courageously battling my natural tendency, I stepped out, sporting one of my many shades of crimson. I stood beside my wife as she finished the segment. Finally, we managed to finish our talk and gratefully received warm reviews. Sandy and I work very well together. We have fun. I look forward to doing it again.

Maybe next time we won't have to pull any quills out of each other.

\*For more on The Marriage Course visit this website <http://themarriagecourse.org/>.

*Hooked on Recovery* is a biweekly message from CCAR Executive Director Phillip Valentine, person in recovery since 12/28/87, devoted husband, a father of five and just another surf fisherman. These thoughts, views and opinions reflect on his personal recovery and are not meant in any way to speak for the entire recovery community. He welcomes all your comments and suggestions on this column, email him at [phillip@ccar.us](mailto:phillip@ccar.us). Visit the website at [www.ccar.us](http://www.ccar.us) to read the entire series.