

# Tina's Musings

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## -EXQUISITE DILEMMAS-

An Exquisite Dilemma is when what one partner needs is exactly what the other cannot tolerate.

### ~Some Examples~

Tanya has a thing about "running out of stuff" or not having what she needs when she needs it. So, she keeps the fridge overstocked. Bob has a touch of ADD and goes nuts trying to find anything in the overstuffed fridge.

Gloria feels more comfortable about her day when she knows what the agenda is- what they are going to do and when. Charles is very uncomfortable about feeling pressured by an agenda. He prefers to go with the flow and cannot stand to be pinned down by a schedule.

Mark is a very anxious person. Even with medication, it doesn't take much to make him feel upset, even sick. It is hard for him when his wife calls with complaints, anger, tears and problems with the kids. She, on the other hand, was raised in a family of 8 kids, where you were not likely to be heard- particularly about negative things. It is very important to her that her difficult emotions are listened and tended to.

Exquisite Dilemmas require creative problem-solving and a bit of envelope-stretching for each partner.

### DC Wrote:

Thank you for the explanation. The very day I read it, I noticed an "Exquisite Dilemma" like scenario in my own relationship and being able to give it a name, made me smile and yes, relax. I always used to get annoyed when my wife and I would take a break for a few moments from our busy schedule to sit down in the garden and just relax. But just as we sat down, she would start discussing future plans, work and jobs to be done, etc. This was not what I needed to help me relax in our short and rare mutual break. But thanks to what you wrote, I have realized that those breaks were for my wife a moment to ponder on the current state of affairs and think about the next steps without implying immediate action or commitment. I can see the situation now from a different perspective and am able to deal with it with ease.

### LP Wrote:

What an insight! I really appreciate this new terminology and way of identifying this type of situation. It would be even more helpful to me to know what to do when it arises in my relationship. I strongly related to the idea of how partners may have conflict when they have different agendas and beliefs about the best way to plan their day, but how can you resolve the issue without one person getting their way and the other being forced to live by their partner's values.

### ~Strategies~

The most important part of working with an Exquisite Dilemma is recognizing that the situation is difficult in and of itself. It isn't really anybody's fault. So, the first part of the solution is to recognize that you are both in this Difficult Situation. It does not help to say, "we wouldn't be if only you..." Y'all are in a dilemma. How can you modify the situation to ease the tension?

For instance look at **what's important about the situation** for each of you. How might things be arranged so that a lot of what's important to each is addressed, With Gloria and Charles, for example, she wanted to be able to count on getting a couple of things done that day. For him, it was most important that he not be pinned down by time pressures. He was able to commit to doing two of the tasks she cared about at some time that afternoon and she was satisfied.

If a decision has to come down to one side or the other (and we're not talking about major decisions like having children or moving to another state) then **find a simple mode of deciding**-flip a coin; play rock, paper, scissors; negotiate; barter; trade and then go along with the winner's choice even though it feels bad. It will eventually grow on you. That's the envelope stretching part.

You can modify a situation by **framing it differently** too. Bruce had a hard time going along with Toby to the gathering of her family. He didn't feel very comfortable with them and some of them got in his nerves. He would complain a lot before such trips and would beg off events Toby thought it very important to attend. However, he found that ascribing himself a mission for these visits - e.g., looking after the children so that Toby could relax; checking in with the younger generation of nieces and nephews so as to play his part as a family elder-made these visits more meaningful to him and thus more tolerable.

Creative problem-solving means **considering the whole system** and various kinds of changes. In the Exquisite Dilemma involving the refrigerator, 3 factors ended up making a positive difference:

- (1) The purchase of a new refrigerator (which was needed anyhow) turned out to be helpful because the racks were arranged in a way that made it easier to find things.
- (2) Tanya started working more and had less time for shopping.
- (3) Bruce got better looking behind and under things.

**Creative problem-solving** makes relationships more interesting and thus ultimately more successful.