Getting Along in Relationships

John Gottman, co-founder of the Gottman Relationship Institute and clinical psychologist at the University of Washington in Seattle, describes four dangerous habits (four horsemen of the apocalypse) that can lead to the breakdown of a relationship. Do you recognize any of them in your relationship?

- **Criticism** - a criticism is not a complaint. A complaint addresses a specific action while a criticism goes beyond a specific event to attack the character or personality of your partner. E.g., "I feel upset that you were half an hour late for our meeting? is a complaint; ?You?re so irresponsible and uncaring to be late? is a criticism.

- **Defensiveness** - statements in response to a criticism or complaint that imply you don?t understand, it?s not my fault, or it?s your fault.

- **Contempt** - criticism with an edge, disdain, disgust, mocking, putting the other person down, expressed verbally or non-verbally. When criticism and defensiveness go viral, contempt soon enters in and can become the ?cancer? of relationships.

- **Stonewalling** - ignoring the other person completely, tuning them out, leaving the room, refusing to communicate, often associated with being flooded emotionally.

It?s the persistence of these patterns that is toxic and why it is important to recognize and correct them with what Gottman calls ?repair attempts?, e.g., an apology or an appreciation. It?s also important for the other person to recognize when a repair attempt is being made and to be receptive to it.