

“Don’t let the little irritants pile up”.

Have you ever wondered why a simple little irritant can cause a major blow up? Or something you used to think was cute is now making your cringe? Well, it could be because you are letting little events pile up and accumulate until they have become a major problem. You may be collecting these minor irritants and bottling them up until the pressure gets too much, and you explode.

You are not alone. Many partners store these incidents away, and save them for something really big. Unfortunately, it can take just one too many little irritant to lead to a blow-up. This concept was wonderfully illustrated in a book written in the 1970s by Richard Lessor called *Love & Marriage and Trading Stamps*. Back then, it was very popular for people to cash in their books of trading stamps, collected from purchases, in exchange for prizes like goods or services. Today we collect stamps from certain fast food restaurants to be applied against future purchases, or we accumulate points for air travel.

The analogy that partners often collect emotional trading stamps is a good one. For example, you might be irritated because your partner left a piece of clothing lying on the floor. You say to yourself, “It’s no big deal, I’ll just pick it up myself and hang it in the closet.” No big deal, of course, but an emotional trading stamp goes in the book. Sometime later you might find some dirty dishes left out on the counter and not put in the dishwasher. Again you think, “Oh well, no problem. I’ll put them away.” Another stamp is stuck in the book. And so it goes, until one day you discover some minor thing, such as your partner leaving on the lights. You go to your book and to your dismay you discover that it’s full. Now the only option you have is to cash in. And, wow, do you *cash In!*

How many of you collect and save these kind of emotional trading stamps? Some of them might be labeled Guilt Stamps, Jealousy Stamps, Pity Stamps and

Hostility Stamps. Maybe you can think of some favorite ones you collect.

The fact is that saving these stamps leads to a repression of your emotions, which when finally released can overwhelm yourself and your partner. Your partner may be totally stunned and wonder why the major reaction about such a minor irritant.

It would be better to not wait until you have collected too many offences, but to deal with them in a timely and reasonable manner. My suggestion, therefore, is that you get some assistance to help you process and deal with these emotional trading stamps before they pile up.