

---

# The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Lethal Patterns that can ruin relationships

(March 05) Certain types of interactions are detrimental to any relationship: partnerships, parents & children, friends, associates, fellow employees and of course couples. Relationship expert John Gottman has aptly named 4 of these interactions “**The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse**” due to the lethal nature they have on relationships. These include and often follow in order: Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness & Stonewalling. I will provide a brief description of each here, and as I do, ask you: How often do these show up in your interactions with others? How often do you want them to?

**Criticism:** Although many of us may have a ‘complaint’ about someone, criticism will be more global, will have with it negative words about the other person, often referencing “who they are”, their character or personality. While a complaint focuses on a specific behavior, criticism includes blame and character assassination.

**Contempt:** This horseman shows up in the form of sarcasm, cynicism, name calling, eye rolling, sneering, mockery and hostile humor. Contempt is poisonous to the relationship as it often conveys disgust (ouch!). Often coming from a place of hurt, anger, isolation, etc... the main purpose of contempt seems to be to demean or hurt the other person and is often fueled by long-simmering negative thoughts about the other person.

**Defensiveness:** This horseman will show up in many venues, and often as a response when approached from a place of criticism or contempt. Although this may seem “understandable”, defensiveness often has the message of blame, in effect saying “The problem isn’t me, it’s you”. Instead of resolving a conflict or issue, defensiveness often escalates the conflict, which makes it so lethal.

**Stonewalling:** This horseman will show up often as a result of some one or combination of the above horsemen showing up, eventually one partner simply “tunes out”. This “tuning out” is what is referred to as stonewalling. By shutting down or tuning out the other, one partner may be “avoiding” a conflict, but they are also avoiding the other person and the relationship! Stonewalling usually shows up later in the relationship as it takes time for the “negativity” from the other horsemen to reach a level of “tuning out”.

*\*How much of this is going on in your life?\**

Knowing, awareness and understanding are some of the first steps in creating change in your life. If you are seeing these patterns in one or more of your relationships, and are not sure what to do about them, contact me for a complimentary consultation or relationship coaching session at [jim@trulyhumancoaching.com](mailto:jim@trulyhumancoaching.com) . Be sure to watch next month for some hints for positive, constructive ways to deal with the horseman! Until then, may I suggest, come from a place of giving and love.

