



## **Relationship Insurance\***

**\*Make sure your relationship will last**

By Ken Johnston

## ***Relationship Insurance***

[happierrelationships.com](http://happierrelationships.com)

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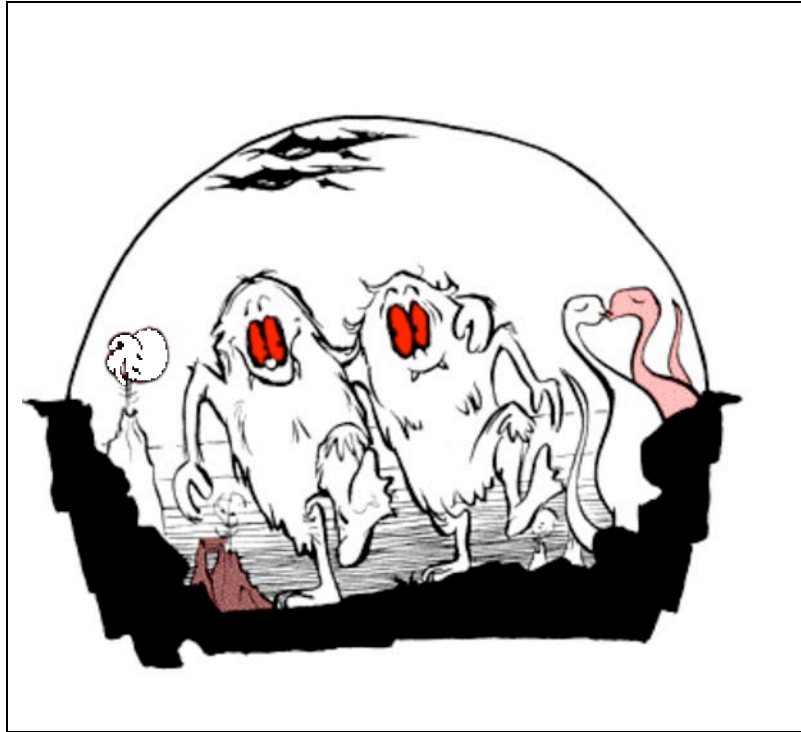
(Nobody likes to read this kind of stuff. We wish we didn't have to do it.)

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Love is everywhere.

## The Relationship Insurance Book

*Note: The terms "marriage" and "relationship" are used interchangeably throughout the book. Fifty years ago virtually all couples who were committed to each other, got married. Today, it's not uncommon to find couples who are just as committed, simply living together. To reflect these realities, we use relationship and marriage throughout the book to mean the same thing.*

This book came about because of a request by my friend David. David had done me the favor of reading the book I wrote for single people looking to form a relationship. And, he also read the book I wrote to help people make an imperfect relationship happier. David had an earlier marriage that ended in divorce, so he could apply his experience to both books.

He was very helpful and gave us excellent feedback. At the end of his feedback he said, "Ken, you don't have a book for me in your series. I'm about to get engaged, and I've already found the person I want to spend the rest of my life with. My fiancé and I need a book that tells us step by step what to do to guarantee that our marriage won't end in divorce. We want to be among the 50% of marriages that last: "til death do us part."

I wrote David a letter, and included the habits and practices he and his fiancé would need to guarantee that their marriage would last. Word began to spread and others, in the same position, asked for a copy of what we had given to David and Beth.

The feedback we got was that we should keep the letter to David and Beth in the book we offer as relationship insurance for couples starting to get serious or who are engaged. I hope you agree.

Dear David and Beth,

Romance! Love! Joy! Agony! As you both know, marriage is a wonderful blend.

The goal of this bundle (A/V, text, practices, and Forum) is to help you make sure that your marriage is more joy than agony, and to help guarantee that it will really last for the rest of your lives.

Here are the choices you have with the material in this book.

*Option 1.* Both of you just read this book; don't do the practices or learn the skills. You've improved your odds by an estimated 8%. Now the odds of success are raised from 50% to an estimated 58%.

*Option 2.* One of you reads the book, does the practices and learns the skills. Your odds of a successful lasting marriage jump to an estimated 80%.

*Option 3.* Both of you read the book. One of you does the practices and learns the skills. You've improved your odds to an estimated 90% chance of lasting.

*Option 4.* Both of you read the book, each of you learning the skills and doing the practices that are right for you. For example, David, Beth is an optimist. So, she won't need to take much time, if any, with the practices for becoming an optimist. You, on the other hand, as you've told me, tend to be a pessimist. Every successful marriage requires at least one optimist, according to the world's leading expert on Optimism, Dr. Martin Seligman. For your happiness, and for Beth's sake, and to give you every chance of success, you need the practices that will help you become more of an optimist. So, each of you may do what you need to do to master the skills you don't have, and do just enough to sharpen the skills you already have.

By working this way, with everything I've learned from Dr. David Gottman's book, "The Mathematics of Marriage," I estimate that your odds of a happy, lifelong marriage jump to more than 98%.

*Option 5.* Both of you read the book together. Both of you learn all of the skills and do the practices together. I estimate that your odds of a happy, lifelong marriage only improve to 60%. I know this seems odd, because a lot of couples think it will bring them closer to work through all the exercises together, whether one of them needs a particular skill or not. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to work that way.

I don't recommend option 5. After you've both read the book, if you are still tempted to try option 5, call me and I'll tell you why it is riskier than option 4, or better yet, ask it on the forum, then all of the other couples will learn as well.

### **What secrets are we going to reveal that will guarantee that your relationship lasts?**

- You each will need to have a positivity ratio of 5 to 1. That means that you need to give your partner 5 positive messages for every negative message (messages of equal weight). We'll help you learn to do that. Every successful relationship requires at least one positive person, and it's much better if you both are positive.
- Whenever you have an 'issue' discussion, make sure you begin the discussion on a positive note, and end it on a positive note. This means you don't discuss an issue when either of you is angry, sad, domineering, belligerent, defensive, disgusted or contemptuous. Make an agreement that one or both of you will "walk away" until you can start the discussion with humor, affection, or one of the other positive modes.
- Identify, as early as you can, those 'issues' in your relationship that are irresolvable. Every relationship will have some. Decide before you marry if you can live with her irresolvable issues. Ask her to decide if she can live with yours. If you both say, "Yes," then promise each other that you will accept that issue in

the other person and vow never, ever, to fight about that issue once you're married. If you are able, you might even practice handling those issues with humor, good grace, and love.

- At least one of you needs to be an optimist, and it is better if both you are optimistic about the future. Research shows you'll live longer, be healthier, and be better marriage partners if you're both optimistic about your future together.

At the end of the book I identify all of the big and little secrets to making a relationship last. But, those listed above are the big ones and if you come close to living with mutual positivity, start and end your 'issue' discussions on a positive note, treat your irresolvable issues with acceptance and humor, and stay optimistic about the future, you'll get what you want. You'll have a relationship that gets happier and happier with time, and has almost a zero chance of ending in divorce.

Earlier readers have told us they want a deeper understanding of what we mean by a 5 to 1 positivity ratio.

David, this is especially important for you, because your dominant form of humor is negativity and pessimism. You are the funniest negative person I've ever known, and I suspect that underneath that persona really lies a very positive guy.

Further, because you're getting married again you must be considered at least hopeful — if not optimistic — regarding your relationship.

Anyone who uses negativity and pessimism as a form of humor runs the risk that sometimes that negativity may be misunderstood.

I got an email from a young woman with a question regarding how positive her husband was toward her.

It turns out that they had an irresolvable issue regarding her return to work after they had a baby. He expected that she would quickly return to work and help maintain their comfortable lifestyle. Before she had the baby, that had been her expectation as well.

After she had the baby, she read a great deal about babies' mothers who worked, versus babies whose mothers stayed home with them. Whether right or wrong, she formed a strongly held opinion that it would be much better for the baby's health and well being, if they cut back on their lifestyle and she became a 'stay at home' mom.

This 'issue' quickly became irresolvable. Right or wrong, neither of them was going to change their view. He blamed her for going back on her commitment to him, and she blamed him for not agreeing that it was the best thing they could do for their child. They failed to recognize that this was an irresolvable issue, and continued to fight about it.

One evening, when he came home from work, the house had the normal amount of mess that toddler's homes often have, and due to a doctor's appointment, she was late in preparing dinner.

The husband exploded with anger and said to her, “I’m sick and tired of coming home to a pigsty. If you’re too lazy to get off your fat ass and go back to work, you could at least keep a decent house and have dinner ready on time.”

She wanted to know how many negative points did his tirade count for, and how many positive interactions would he have to have to end up with a 5 to 1 positivity ratio?

In my answer, I included the ratings used by Dr. Gottman et al, in their effort to produce a mathematical model to predict marriage stability and divorce probability in a couple after observing 15 minutes of discussion on some issue that they often disagreed about.

Here is the point list:

<b>Weighing Positive Vs. Negative Interactions</b>	
Surprise/Joy	+4
Humor	+4
Affection	+4
Validation hi/lo	+4
Tension/humor	+2
Interest	+2
Neutral	+0.1
-----	
Tension	0
-----	
Whining	-1
Sadness	-1
Domineering	-1
Anger	-1
Defensiveness	-2
Stonewalling	-2
Criticism	-2
Belligerence	-2
Disgust	-3
Contempt	-4

In his tirade, the husband expressed disgust, anger, contempt, and multiple criticisms of her person, “laziness,” “fat ass” and of her job performance, housekeeping and cooking. Just using the simplest, single counting bookkeeping, he easily has exceeded 13 points of negativity toward his wife.

Research shows that you need a positivity ratio of 5 to 1, so this single tirade might require  $(5 \times 13) = 65$  points of positive interaction.



That is the simplest way to look at the interaction. In fact, she has spent several days repeating what he said to her, in her mind. She has heard his tirade again and again in her head for several days. She repeated it one more time when she wrote me the e-mail.

That was her mistake. She had the coping skills to accept, forgive, and stop looping on his tirade, but it also shows the extreme risks involved whenever one uses contempt, disgust, domineering or belligerence. A big tirade like his must have overwhelmed her coping capabilities, because she kept repeating it over and over in her mind.

In my reply I suggested instead of counting points, she focus on using her coping skills to minimize the damage, consider what he said as a single data point in a huge bank of more positive communications, and ask him “positively” if they could agree to treat the subject of her working as an irresolvable issue, and treat it with acceptance, grace, and humor. Now, you must be asking yourself, “How does this apply to me?”

You’ve insulted me so many times, in so many funny ways on the tennis courts and golf course that I’m very comfortable that you are just being funny, and don’t really mean any of the things you say to be truly negative.

You *are* very funny, and that makes you a joy to be with. Your companions, however, need to have a fairly thick skin because there is usually a kernel of truth in your insults and observations.

You’ll notice on the chart that humor is a very positive way to express yourself to your partner. Humor is even positive as a tension reducer when you are having a small marital tiff. It could be that your strong use of humor is one of the things that make her want to be your life partner. The risk you run is that she starts listening more to the tiny kernel of truth than to the humorous wrapping you put around it.

Knowing you as I do, I think you’ll do great, especially if you start adding a lot of affection, validation, and interest into your interactions with her.

For Beth’s part, I would recommend that she pay a lot of attention to the “Coping” skills, so she can quickly dismiss any discomfort she might feel about sometimes having your relationship be the butt of your jokes.

For all couples reading this book and learning the skills that will insure their marriage against divorce, I have the following recommendations:

1. Each of you read the text without doing the practices. We’ve made it a fast read.
2. Make a self-assessment about how positive, or optimistic you are, and how well you cope with little bad feelings as well as real adversities that you’ve faced in your life. Decide if there are any of these skills that you can skip because you already possess them. It might be useful to ask your partner if he or she agrees with your perceptions.

3. Make your own plan for doing the practices that will build the skills. Pick the skill you think you need most and start with that. So, you can proceed to do the practices in the sequence you think best for you.
4. Remember: It's not a race. You'll use these skills for a lifetime, and it may take a lifetime for you to totally master one or another of them. Take your time, be persistent, never stop practicing, and give your partner lots of humor, surprise, joy, affection, interest, and validation, now, next year, and forever.

Now, it's time to quickly read the text and decide which modules you want to come back to, to do the practices.

### **Weighing Positive Vs. Negative Interactions**

from Page 8 comes from:

Page:340, Chapter 17 "The Mathematics of Marriage"

Subtitled: Dynamic Nonlinear Models

By Authors:

David M. Gottman

James D. Murray

Catherine C. Swanson

Rebecca Tyson

Kristin R. Swanson

I've simplified the positive and negative weights given for varying interactions by the researchers who combined their talents to produce the incredibly important research documented in "The Mathematics of Marriage."

I warn against careless use of the above listing of SPAFF codes used by the researchers. There are many things the observers use to code the transactions observed by couples being studied. Facial expressions, voice tones, gestures, words, all are digested into codes for each six-second interval of observation. If you really want to understand the process of predicting divorce probabilities based on short observations, you must read "The Mathematics of Marriage."

I further warn you that unless you are a marital researcher, and have graduate level knowledge of statistics and mathematics, the book could not be described as accessible. (It's virtually unreadable, but it is brilliant, ground-breaking research.)

Speaking for myself and other students of marriage, we stand in awe of the genius and talent that produced the discoveries that have advanced the science and art of predicting marriage stability and divorce probability.

## Appreciating Someone

One thing you can totally control is the frequency and quality of the appreciation you give to others. There is nothing to stop you from appreciating everyone in your life as often as you think about it. (We'll help you think about it.)

Expressing your appreciation often — especially if it's the highest quality appreciation — will bring the people in your life closer to you. And (not by accident), the more appreciation you give, the more appreciation you are likely to get back.

If you haven't thought about the frequency or quality of your appreciation, you may find you've been giving your appreciation in meager doses, like, "Hey, great shirt man." You could be giving much stronger appreciation, like, "You're always so cheerful. Thanks for being my buddy."

Giving frequent, high quality doses of appreciation will make you happier. It will also make the people in your life happier. So, when you find that person who might someday become your life partner, you can make your partner feel happier and appreciated. You also increase the odds that you'll get some appreciation too. (But, don't count on it. That's not why you're doing it.)

If you decide to become happier by giving more frequent, high quality portions of appreciation, we've got a lot to offer. It's easy, fast, and rewarding.

Appreciating someone is the act of communicating to someone how important they (or something they've done), are to you.

You may call appreciation many things:

- respect
- esteem
- treasure
- regard (you may regard the person, or an act)

You may:

- appreciate
- acknowledge
- attach importance to
- be grateful for
- be thankful for

As you can see, appreciating someone is a huge category of things. If you're more comfortable calling it "respecting someone" or "acknowledging someone," feel free. The idea is simple. Someone does *something* you value (an act), or is *someone* you value (the person).

Appreciating someone is the *act* of *communicating* your appreciation to that person. We say, “act” because it involves an action, not just a thought. We say “communicating” because that implies the person “hears” the message.

The communication can be in person, by phone, by Instant Message, by email, by note, by card, or delivered through another person. The act of appreciating someone will make you happier. It will also, most likely, make the other person happier as well.

This step is all about becoming more aware of the people in your life whom you appreciate, and the acts of others whom you appreciate. Once you are aware of the people and the acts, this step is about increasing the frequency with which you actively communicate your appreciation. In addition to more awareness and frequency, this step is also about making your expressions of appreciation more powerful.

Before we begin the practice, let’s be clear on what makes an expression of appreciation powerful or wimpy.

#### **An example:**

You’ve got your arms full of stuff, and as you approach the door a stranger stops and holds the door for you. How do you express your appreciation?

- You smile and nod. (wimpy)
- You say, “Thank you.” (fairly minimal)
- You say, “I appreciate your holding the door.” (appreciating the act)
- You say, “You’re very kind; thank you.” (appreciating the person)
- You say, “Thank you! You’re very thoughtful. I really appreciate your help.” (You’ve appreciated both the act and the person, and said it was meaningful to you.)
- You say, “Wow! Thanks! You’ve saved my life. Come to dinner Sunday.” (You’ve gone too far. That’s over the top.)

#### **Another example:**

You’re the boss, and one of your employees does some good work.

- You smile, and give the employee a thumbs up. (better than nothing but fairly wimpy).
- You smile and say, “I like what you did.” (appreciating the act)
- You smile and say, “Good job. You always do that, so well.” (appreciating the act — more powerful because you made it pervasive with the word “always.”)
- You smile and say “Good job. I can always count on you.” (appreciating the act, and also appreciating the person)
- Big grin as you say, “Terrific job. I can always count on you. You make my job easy, and you’re really good for this company.” (appreciating the act, the person,

saying why the person is meaningful to you as well as meaningful to the company)

- Big smile as you say, “Great job. You’re terrific at what you do. My boss was saying nice things about the department, and I told her you were a really important reason things were going so well.” (Appreciating the act, the person, and sharing your appreciation with the person, and third parties as well.)

Okay, you’ve got the idea.

1. *Appreciate the single act*: nice, but wimpy.
2. *Appreciate the act more broadly* (“always”): stronger but not personal
3. *Appreciate the act, and the person*: much stronger
4. *Appreciate the act, and the person more broadly* (“always”): very strong.
5. *Appreciate the act broadly, the person broadly, and why it’s meaningful to you*: fantastic; really strong; powerful.

## How to Communicate the Appreciation

These are rough guidelines; feel free to ignore. These tend to be weak to strong, top to bottom.

An email message

An instant message

A handwritten note

A phone call

A personal letter

Face to face verbal.

If you communicate a very powerful appreciation, any medium will work. If it’s really powerful, sometimes it’s better to have it in writing so the person can look at it again and again. (I’ve seen really good ones framed.)

Escalate your appreciation gently. Don’t leap from one who only nods to one who is effusive in your thanks overnight. The suddenness of the shift will be uncomfortable for some people, and it probably will be uncomfortable for you as well.

Increase your appreciation power at a moderate pace. There isn’t any hurry. You’re building a habit that will last your lifetime.

If you’ve been pretty lax in appreciating the people in your lives, start with appreciating their acts. When you’re both comfortable with that level, shift to appreciating the person, when you both comfortable with that level, start explaining what they mean to you.

Frequency and power are both important. It's important to ramp up both frequency and power.

You may find it difficult to imagine how much happier this change in you will make you. You're also likely to find yourself getting more appreciation as well. A happier you makes all the people in your life happier.

The Quick Start and Formal practices for "Appreciating Someone" have been combined.



## Combined Quick Start and Formal Practices for Appreciating Someone

**Estimated time to build this habit: 60 to 180 days.**

### Goal:

Write a goal statement, e.g. “I will practice expressing stronger and more frequent appreciation to the people who are important to me until I am comfortable that I can do it habitually.”

My goal: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Getting ready for the Practice

- A. Make a list of people who are important to you in some way. (Family, friends, co-workers, sub-ordinates, life partners, etc.) See next page.
- B. Decide how you want to communicate that appreciation to each one (what medium you will use).

### Daily Practice:

- Pick one person.
- Draft the strongest message of appreciation you feel comfortable with.
- Decide how and when that day you will deliver it.
- Deliver it.
- Write down any reactions you got in the last 24 hours from prior appreciations you’ve given.
- Note your feelings about the reaction you got. Did it make you happier?
- Continue with the next person on the list, until you have completed your list. Feel free to add to the list as you go along.
- Start back at the top and do it again. This time a little stronger.

Review your goal.

<b>My feelings</b>							
<b>Reaction</b>							
<b>How I will communicate</b>							
<b>People important in my life</b>							

### You're Done When

... you've gone through the list several times, and you are confident that you've built an enduring habit of gradually escalating appreciation for the people who are important to you in your life. Pay special attention to appreciating your partner.



## Four Questions Four Choices (Coping Quick Start Version)

This Quick Start Version of Coping is brought to you because some readers who have taken the full audio-visual version (“Four Questions and a Map”) have said, “We don’t need to understand how the mind works to cope effectively. We don’t need to understand how we are creating and distorting the thoughts that are making us hurt. All we need is to learn and practice the four questions and four choices. They are where all the value is. They work great, and we don’t even have to think about how the mind works.”

So, they suggest that we downplay the Map. That is what we are going to do in this Quick Start Version. If you find this is too big a leap of faith for you, or if you’re curious why this coping skill is so powerful, you can quit this Quick Start text and watch the audio-visual version, or read the whole story at [HowToBeHappier.com](http://HowToBeHappier.com).

We’ll start with a list of important beliefs that you need to use the short course. During the complete course, you’ll learn each one individually and understand them completely. If you can just accept them without fully understanding why they are true, go ahead and use this Quick Start Version: “Four Questions Four Choices.”

### The Sage Model

The “Sage Model” is the name of the ‘Map’ from the audio-visual program “Four Questions and a Map.” You won’t learn much about the Map here, but it teaches and illustrates three important concepts. If you agree with these three concepts, then you will find it easier to cope with issues, difficulties, and any kind of bad feelings.

#### ● You create your own feelings

First of all, it shows that you create your own feelings — good or bad. Most people think that people or events cause their feelings, but they don’t! Feelings are created inside the mind by the way you process and interpret inputs from people and events in your life.

You may have little control over the people or those events, but you can have almost total control over the way you experience and interpret them.

#### ● You choose your own strategies

Some of the strategies you currently choose, get you what you want, but others don’t. “Four Questions Four Choices,” shows you how to choose a productive strategy.

## • You create your own internal conflict and tension

The most common inner conflict is between the parts of your personality. Different parts want different things. If they don't get their needs met, they can fight and argue — right inside your head. It's called "self-talk:" talk, talk, and more talk. One of your parts may need to work, for example, while another part needs to be with your partner. The parts can fight each other, or undermine each other, or manipulate each other, until you — the whole you — feels really stressed out and isn't happy no matter what you do. The win-win resolution of those inner parts conflicts is handled by your Sage part — your wisest part — so you can have some peace of mind.

## Accepting the Concepts

If you can accept these concepts:

**You create your own feelings.**

**You choose your own strategies**

**You create your own internal conflict and tension.**

... without fully understanding *why* they are true, then you're ready to learn to cope with issues, difficulties, and any kind of bad feelings.

The goal of the coping process is to relieve you from strong negative emotions by using your question processing mechanism. This switch takes you from being run by strong emotions to using rationality.

Here are the four questions that you ask yourself anytime you are thinking about something that hurts or feels bad.

### 1. What's Happening?

The answer to this question simply makes you aware that you are creating some sort of bad feeling.

### 2. How am I creating this bad feeling?

To answer this question, you need to know how your mind works, and learn the vocabulary of the Sage Model. You're going to skip this question because you're not learning the Sage Model. Don't be concerned that you're missing something important. You won't need to understand it, as long as you accept the idea that you: create your own feelings, choose your own strategies, and create your own inner tension, you don't need to know how that's happening.

**3. Is this (the feeling I'm creating) what I want for my life?**

Some bad feelings are normal, healthy, and natural. For example, your dog dies. You want to feel the loss. You'll want to grieve. You'll want to cope with the loss, but you don't want to extinguish authentic human feelings.

Most of the time your answer to that question will be "no." For example, "No. The anger I'm feeling at the moment at my partner is not what I want for my life."

The magic and power of this question keeps you regularly in touch with your life goals and what kind of life you want for yourself. It also makes sure that the choices you make are in support of reaching your life's goals.

**4. How can I move toward what I want in my life?**

This question prompts you to look at the four wise choices and choose the one that will best move you toward what you want for your life. If you limit your choices to just these four, you can be assured of making a wise choice.

(There are probably a million other things you could do in response to your bad feeling, but many of them would be unwise, and would not take you closer to your life's goals.)

**The four wise choices are Act, Ask, Accept, and Forgive**

Let's start with the first choice.

**Act**

You will choose to ACT when action is useful, productive, and will take you closer to your goals. For example, if you have bad feelings about an interaction you have with your partner — and we know because you're reading this that one of your life's goals is to have a great relationship — then you might choose to apologize for your part in the transaction that went wrong. In other words, take ACTION.

**Ask**

You will choose to ASK when discussion or negotiation will have a good chance to bring you closer to what you want in your life. If you and your partner have productive 'issue' discussions, which begin in a good place and end in a good place, and are often productive, you'll choose to ASK frequently.

If, however, you and your partner have not yet mastered productive 'issue' discussions, you might ASK less often.

**Accept**

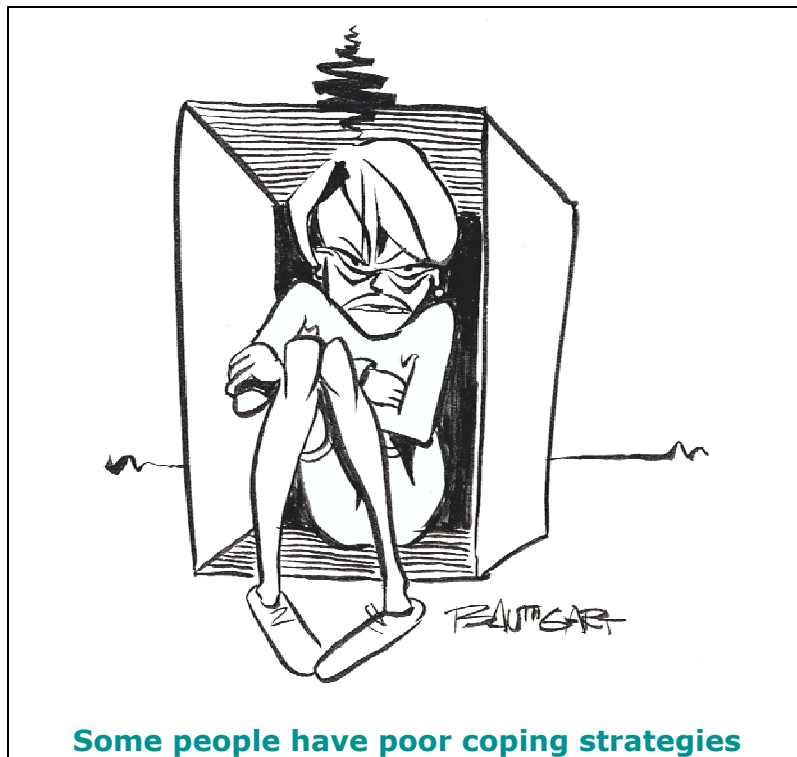
You will choose ACCEPT when acting and asking wouldn't give you a good outcome. Your partner has opinions or actions that may drive you nuts, but your differences are

irresolvable, so ACCEPT that that's the way your partner is — especially when you consider this a tiny failing in the context of all the great things you appreciate about your partner. Accepting what you can't change is wise.

### **Forgive**

If you find something you can't accept, then FORGIVE. Forgiveness is wise, and lots of forgiveness is very useful in making a relationship harmonious.

That's really all there is to coping wisely: Four Questions, Four Choices.



## Quick Start Practice for Coping

### First Day Practice Preparation

Make a list of every thing that your partner does, says, or thinks that you don't like — things that you use to create your bad feelings.

### Daily Practice

Pick one item from the list you made, and ask the four questions.

Then make the wisest of the four choices:

1. If *Action* is wisest, schedule when you will take the chosen action.
2. If *Asking* is wisest, schedule when you will ask, discuss or negotiate regarding the 'issue.'
3. If *Accepting* is wisest, mark your decision to accept it by writing it down, saying it out loud to yourself (or some other way that will be memorable for you). Then, the next time the issue arises, you'll remember that you've chosen to accept that particular thing in your partner.
4. If *Forgiving* is wisest, mark your decision to forgive by writing it down, saying it out loud to yourself (or some other way you will remember). Then, when the issue comes to your mind, you'll have an immediate memory that you've chosen to forgive someone (maybe even yourself). Allow yourself to feel good about your forgiving nature and appreciate how powerful your forgiveness will be in achieving what you want for your life.

### You're done when

You'll know you're done when you've handled every item on your list, and you automatically remind yourself immediately — when a bad feeling arises — of your decision to accept or forgive. If you've taken action, or asked, those should be resolved. Until this becomes automatic and instantaneous, you'll still be loaded down with bad feelings about your partner that haven't yet been successfully resolved.



## Being Positive

Positivity is the ratio of positive to negative thoughts or statements. Think for a moment about someone you know who is extremely positive. No matter what's happening this person almost always has something positive to say. Now, think about someone you know who is truly negative. You seldom hear positive comments, and frequently hear complaints, gripes, sarcasm, cynicism, or critical statements.

The first person has a high positivity ratio. The second person has a low positivity ratio.

Raising your positivity ratio will make you happier. And, everyone around you who is positive will be happier as well. Negativity can bring other people down, and invites them to be negative too.

By raising your positivity ratio, you'll be happier in many ways. First, you'll be happier yourself. Next, you'll make the people around you happier. And, no matter how grumpy you may be, you're always going to be happier when those around you are happier. Your family (kids, parents, siblings, etc.) will be happier when you are more positive. Your co-workers will be happier when you're happier, and so will your friends.

Many scientific studies have been done, and they confirm the same thing. If you can *keep your own positivity ratio at five to one, or better*, you'll be a truly positive person, and so will more of those around you.

In work situations, it has been proven that managers who are positive while relating to their employees — on a ratio of at least five to one — will have happier employees, less turnover, more productivity, and more loyal employees.

In marriages, it has been studied with incredible care. In the book called “The Mathematics of Marriage,” the leading marriage expert Dr. John Gottman shows that marriages that last are those where the partners each have positivity ratios higher than five to one, while interacting with their partner.

If you have a low positivity ratio, you will be less happy. Your relationships will have gone sour, your kids will be difficult, you probably won't get to manage people, and if you do, they won't be happy. Even your friends won't be that happy with you.

Is there any limit to positivity? Can there be too much positivity?

Yes, the benefits of being positive start to reverse when your ratio goes above about thirteen to one. That's Pollyanna territory. If you're *always* positive, and *never* critical, assertive, or distrustful — even when it is called for — you lose much of what you gained by being positive.

If you have a low positivity ratio, you probably don't have to worry about becoming too positive. If you want to learn to lift your positivity ratio, we've got some useful practice that will enable you to turn things around and become much more positive. It won't happen overnight, and it will challenge you, but if you do a little tiny bit everyday, you can turn your ratio around and start heading higher in a very short time. Every day that you persist, and every day that you practice the five-minute practice, your ratio will creep ever so slightly higher. You'll discover an amazing change in yourself.

It has been estimated that each of us has more than 200,000 thoughts each day. That's 200,000 negative thoughts if you're a truly negative person. That's painful. If you can turn that around, you'll eventually be getting maybe 170,000 or more of those thoughts to be positive. That's becoming happier!

You don't leap from grump to Pollyanna. You creep, day-by-day, ever so slightly higher, until pretty soon people start to notice a change in you. You'll become happier, your relationship partner will be happier, and so will everyone you deal with. In six months, or maybe even a year, just doing five minutes a day of positivity practice will totally reverse your positivity ratio. And, you will be happier.

Getting to a five to one positivity ratio if you've been a negative, critical person, may be difficult for you, and for a while, you won't feel natural and like you're really being you. Yet, it is the most powerful change you can make in yourself and your life. And, the practice only takes a few minutes a day to do, and it is really easy to do. So, if you are committed, and have the ability to persist, you can become a positive person.

### **Example**

A negative person and a positive person are watching a TV drama. The negative person is constantly noticing "what's wrong or bad" with the characters and the lines in the TV show. The positive person is looking to see "what's good or right" with the characters and lines in the TV show.

The positive person finds the good, even if a critic might find the show to be dreadful. The negative person finds every flaw, blemish, mistake, or weakness in the show. The positive person enjoys the show. The negative person might enjoy it, but mostly enjoys finding the flaws. If the negative person insists on commenting on every flaw, it's difficult for the positive person to continue enjoying the show. And, unless the positive person is mentally tough, the constant carping can make the positive person turn negative about the show.



## Another Example

Here is one person's idea for creating more positivity.

*"I used to pick up my son and two of his friends from school each day. On the trip home it seemed as if all I ever heard were complaints. When I got tired of that I decided to do something about it. I told them if they wanted to continue their diatribes, they could do that, but each of them would first have to start the trip with three things that had gone well. Some days the positive comments were pretty thin, such as "Well, at least I didn't fall down during gym class." However, the trip got better over time and certainly was much more enjoyable for me, and, I believe for them as well. Years later I discovered how powerful that exercise was when I heard my son say to his son, "Tell me three things that went well before you complain about things that didn't."*

Here is one formula for turning negative thinking into positive. Anytime you're aware that you're having a negative thought, reaction, or feeling about something, ask yourself, "What's good about this?" before you go outside of yourself and express negativity.

Then, when you have found even one thing to like about what's happening, express yourself positively. Maybe at first you just smile or nod. Gradually, you might work yourself up to commenting; "I like this..." about what ever it is you found that was good.

## The Comparator

You have a place in your mind that we call the Comparator. The Comparator's job is to take any input that comes into your mind and evaluate it to see what it is, and what it means to you. That means that every thought you have is evaluated as the Comparator takes it and looks through your storehouse of past experiences to see how to interpret it.

Now, here's the key. The Comparator may be looking for sameness or differences. It might be looking for what's good about it, or what's bad about it. It might be looking for what's right about it or wrong about it. It might be looking for what you like, or what you don't like about it.

It's not your fault that your Comparator may be looking for differences or negatives instead of similarities or positives. Some people are genetically disposed to look for differences and negatives. Others are genetically disposed to look for similarities and positives. If you find the genetic explanation hard to believe, then you can believe the

alternate theory that our Comparators are set by following the examples of one or both of our parents, or other role models in our lives.

The bad news is that the Comparator tends to operate by habit, and if it's set to look for negative stuff, it will habitually find it. The good news is the Comparator is only one place in your mind, and if you want to change it, it is simple to reprogram. Yes, it is simple, but overcoming a long entrenched habit is never quick, so it takes some persistence.

Feel free to change the question your Comparator asks anytime you get a negative thought. Any one in the following list will work. If you get tired of one, pick another and begin asking that.

"What's good about this?" is one way to evaluate your experiences in life. Or you could ask, "What about this fits with ...

- what I think?
- what I believe?
- what I've learned?
- what I've experienced?
- what makes me laugh?
- what makes me emotional?
- with my goals in life?
- with my dreams in life?"

The single most important part of this building this habit is that anytime you get a bad feeling, stop, and begin searching for something about it that is positive. When you find some kind of match, express yourself in some positive way.

Facial positives:

- A smile
- A laugh

Positive Gestures:

- A "thumbs up"
- A "high five"
- A "fist pump"
- A nod

Positive assertions:

- "Yes!"
- "I like..."
- "That's good."

Remember, the goal is five positive expressions for every one negative expression. If you have been a truly negative person, you're going to turn those 200,000 thoughts a day that used to be negative into 370,000 thoughts a day, as you automatically counter at least 170,000 of those thoughts with something positive.

Obviously, you don't need to express yourself positively 170,000 times a day. But, as you find those positive counter thoughts, express at least five of them for every one negative expression you allow yourself.

## Some Thoughts

Here are a few clichés, or homilies that you can tell yourself as you gradually begin evolving away from negativity toward positivity:

*If you don't have anything good to say, don't say anything.*

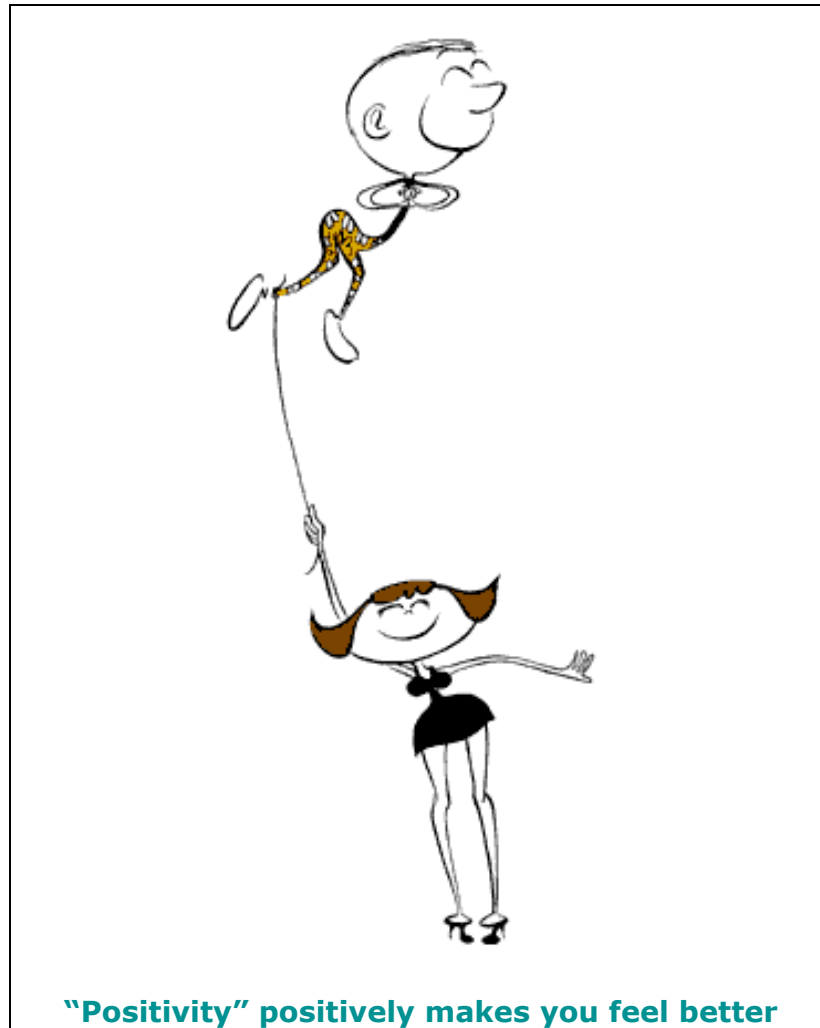
*What sunshine is to flowers, smiles are to humanity. They are but trifles, to be sure, but, scattered along life's pathway, the good they do is inconceivable.*

*It is said that laughter is the best medicine. It is an excellent medicine.*

*The most completely lost of all days is that on which one has not laughed.*

*Some people see things as they are and say "Why?" I dream things that never were and say "Why not?"*

**Note: If you liked the idea of having a Comparator, you may want to read Book Two in the "Metamating Series," to see how it fits into the entire map of the mind (The Sage Model).**



## Quick Start Practice for “Being Positive”

First try this quick start version of the practice. If it doesn't work for you, move to the more formal practice. Here's the minimum you need to know about positivity.

### Quick Start Practice

- Learn to recognize a negative thought. If you don't recognize it immediately when you have it, you may have to spend a few minutes each morning examining your memory of the past twenty-four hours for examples of negative thoughts you had. When you recall a negative thought, counter it with a positive thought, and mark the positive thought by saying it out loud, or writing it down. You're learning to mark the positive thoughts (increase the emotional response).
- As soon as you've learned to recognize a negative or critical thought — right when you get it — reprocess the thought and ask yourself for an opposite thought that is positive.

Example: “This soup is too salty.” You stop and ask yourself, “What is there about the soup that is good?” You might get the answer, “It's got plenty of chicken in it.”

Example: “He's really a bit heavy for his height.” You stop and ask yourself, “Is there anything about him that you like?” You might answer, “He's got a great smile.”

- Now, at that moment, you have two thoughts about something. A negative thought and a positive thought. You only say, use, or remark on the positive thought. You've become a more positive person.
- When you find yourself countering almost every negative thought with a positive thought, and it is happening automatically, you've become more positive. Your life will begin changing, and the people around you will begin changing as well.

That's it. You practice it consciously for a few minutes every day, and eventually it will become automatic. When you meet someone who might be a prospect for a relationship, make every effort to use a high ratio of positive comments to negative ones. If your prospect is very negative, your positivity may be a turn off. That's good, because you want to be with a person who thinks it's great to be positive.

If you've practiced positivity until it has become a habit, go on to learn to be optimistic. You'll discover there are some similarities. Optimism is little more than having positive thoughts about the future. You've already mastered having positive thoughts. You're half way to being more optimistic.

If you found the Quick Start practice for being positive too informal for you, and you'd like a more formal, disciplined practice, with more guidance, we've prepared another set of practices for you, on the next page



## Formal Practice for Being Positive

**Estimated time to build this habit: 30 days to 6 months**

### Goal:

Write a goal statement, e.g. "My goal is to increase positive things I say or do and decrease negative comments, judgments, and assertions, until I have a ratio of five positive for every negative." OR "My goal is to become aware of more positive things and shut up about negative things." OR "My goal is to keep my negative expressions to the barest minimum and find good things to say or express, until my ratio is five positive to one negative."

My goal is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Practice:

#### Daily:

- A. Remember at least three examples of being negative about something or someone in the last 24 hours. Do your best to remember what you said or did to express a negative thought.

#### Negative thoughts:

1.

2.

3.

For each negative expression, consciously ask your comparator for a positive thought about the same person, situation, or thing. Write down the positive thought. This is a way of marking it, and making it have a higher emotional impact for you than simply saying it.

**Positive replacement thoughts:**

1.

2.

3.

Your goal is to begin (and it may take some time, so be patient) to recognize negative thoughts as you are having them. You then ask yourself for a positive thought about the same person, situation or thing. When you do this, if it is appropriate, mark the positive thought by expressing it verbally, or at least in body language and gestures.

- B. When you find you can write down three examples of when you had a negative thought, asked for a positive thought, and expressed it, you can start to raise the bar for yourself.

The next time you come to your log (see next page), see if you can recall four, then five, and so on.

When you get to six or more in a day, you don't need to write them down, it's enough to just recall each of them and congratulate yourself for each one. (We don't want you to take more than 5 minutes out of your day.)



## Daily Log

Date	Three Things

## You're done when

... you find yourself automatically reversing a negative thought by thinking a positive one, and expressing yourself positively as a result. When this is a habit, appreciate yourself and go on to build another skill. Until then, continue the practice.



## Being Optimistic

Being optimistic will make you happier. Optimists live longer, happier, and healthier lives than pessimists. Dr. Martin Seligman, in his book “Learned Optimism,” points to research that proves that optimists live longer, healthier, and happier lives than pessimists. His book also proves his contention that optimism *can be learned*. Using Dr. Seligman’s findings, we can teach you how to be more optimistic.

If you have a low happiness level, odds are good that you tend to be a pessimist. Pessimism is a way of maintaining a low happiness level, or an *unhappiness* level.

Some people are pessimistic in various aspects of their lives. For example, someone may be optimistic when at work, but pessimistic within a relationship. Some other people are more broadly pessimistic. For them, it is difficult to view the future positively in any domain of their lives.

According to the research, every successful relationship must have at least one, and preferably two people who are optimistic. If you are a confirmed pessimist, you’ll probably think that there isn’t much chance that this will really work for you. And, of course, if we were pessimistic, we’d think you might be right. We, however, are optimists. So, we believe you can do it. You can do it if you want to do it.

There are three simple keys to changing your thinking. We’ll teach them to you, and give you a short, fast practice you can do regularly to get you in the habit of optimistic thinking.

Optimism and pessimism are both *habits*. They are habitual patterns of thought. Old habits are not easy to break, but new habits are easy to acquire. We find it helpful not to try to break the pessimism habit, but to build a strong habit of optimism and carry them both forward to use the one that is most appropriate.

How will you know which habit is the most appropriate? Optimists tend to be less realistic than pessimists. Pessimists tend to be more realistic than optimists.

Optimists think anything is possible, and pessimists are more realistic. So, if you convert to optimism, you have to know when to shift back. For example, if you are inspecting parachutes, it pays to use your pessimistic habits of thinking. If you are planning a space launch, it pays to use your pessimism to imagine every possible thing that could go wrong, so you can prepare for it.

If you’re really a confirmed pessimistic, you already knew that optimists aren’t as realistic as pessimists. So, if you decide to convert, you’ll find it useful to reduce your total commitment to reality, and also know when it’s prudent to use the realistic side of your pessimistic realism.

If you're already a confirmed optimist, you don't need this section, although you're welcome to explore if you're curious. We've found that even very optimistic people can learn to be even more optimistic. (You can also learn when it is risky to be overly optimistic.)

If you are a confirmed pessimist — and really want to be happier — please do the practice. If you are sometimes pessimistic and sometimes optimistic, we suggest you learn how to become more optimistic, when it's appropriate.

## **Pessimism vs. Optimism**

Here is the idea: Any time you think of the future, your pessimistic habit of thinking creates a negative scenario. You may even find that you dread thinking about the future because it is so daunting.

To counter the pessimistic habit of thinking, you will learn to “loop” on your thoughts, and use the optimist's formula to create a counter to the negative thoughts.

Pessimistic thoughts tend to have three biases or exaggerations:

1. Me: “It's *my* fault she left. ” (focus on self)
2. Always: “I'll *never* find someone else.” (exaggerates time )
3. Everything: “My *whole life* is ruined.” (excessive scope)

Optimistic thought tends to have three (possibly unrealistic) biases.

1. (Not Me) “It wasn't my fault. I was a good partner.”
2. (Not Always) “I'll have a new relationship in no time.”
3. (Not Everything) “I've still got my job, my friends, my hobbies, my family.”

The examples above are about an event that happened in the past. She left him.

## **Optimism and Pessimism mostly relate to possible *future* events.**

*Pessimism is an unrealistic negative view of the future.*

Bring up almost any subject to a pessimist, and ask what the person sees in the future. “Tell me what you think about the economy?”

I fear the worst. I think it's worse than they say. It scares me. (It will hurt ME.)  
When it collapses, it won't recover in my lifetime. (It will last forever.)  
It'll ruin everything, for everybody. (It will be pervasive ... all aspects of life.)

*Optimism is an unrealistic positive view of the future.*

Ask an optimist about the economy:

It's getting better and better all the time. I see the Dow at 20,000. (Everybody wins.)

We may have a dip or two, but they'll be short lived. (Problems won't be for long.)  
I'll have a comfortable retirement. (One aspect)

Actually, none of us can really know. We're all guessing about the future. But, we all think about the future. So, why not take the most positive view?

If you have worries, you'll discover those worries stem from pessimistic visions of the unknowable future. Worries hurt you. The only known benefit of worry is that it might prompt you to plan in advance for adversities that may never happen.

The wise approach, especially if you're looking for a life partner who is optimistic, is to err on the positive side and be optimistic.

So, here is the optimist's mantra:

Bad things won't happen to me. Maybe to others, but not me. If something bad does happen, it'll be over quickly. And, it'll only affect one aspect of my life. I've got so much more.
---

## Looping

The pessimistic negative thoughts will follow the pessimistic formula:

Something bad will happen "TO ME" in the future.  
It will last a long time, maybe for the rest of my life.  
It will affect my whole life.

So, if you hear that someone had a heart attack, you might think:

I might have a heart attack.  
It may kill me, or at least affect me for a long time.  
My life will be ruined. Some lousy life. I'll be bedridden.

By the way, if you are a confirmed pessimist, you may be right to worry about health problems. Statistics show that optimists live on average about eight years longer than pessimists. Part of the reason for that is the constant negative view of the future creates stress and worry, which is hard on the body.

Do you wonder that optimists live longer? They worry far less. Everything will be fine.

Once you realize that you've had a negative thought *about the future*, you'll practice instantly looping back through your mind again, and using the optimist's formula:

Bad things probably *won't* happen to me. They are more likely to happen to others.  
If I did have a problem, I'd quickly get it fixed, and I'd be fine.  
Nothing can stop me from enjoying my life, my friends, my family, etc.

If you've been somewhat pessimistic, you might have doubts about your ability to change your thoughts. You have lived with negative thoughts *about the future* so long they seem

normal to you. You're right that it's hard to change your thoughts. So, we don't suggest you even try. You're simply going to add a new, overly-positive set of thoughts that you will use to counter the normal, natural negative thoughts that your genes, hormones and parenting probably set you up to have. We say "overly positive" thoughts because that is the way they'll seem to you at first.

If you're confident that you can do what we recommend, then jump over the suggested readings and go right to the practice.

## **Helpful Readings**

If you are somewhat doubtful that you can do what we recommend you may want to read Book Two of the Metamating Series entitled, "Coping: 30 Ways to Change your Self-talk." It will walk you through the Sage Map and show you step by step how thoughts are created, processed, and assessed. Then, when you get to the practice, you'll be able to visualize exactly how you're going to use your mind to become more optimistic.

## Quick Start Practices for Being Optimistic

### Practice:

Here is the outline for your initial practice and for all of the 5-minute practices:

1. Make a list of everything you ever worry about happening in the future. Don't strain to make it too complete; you can always add to it later.
2. Everyday, pick one item from your worry list, and use the optimist's mantra.  
Bad things probably won't happen. (Not Me)  
If it does, it'll be over quickly. (It's fixable)  
There is so much more to my life than that item. (Not pervasive)
3. You'll quickly discover that you have to restate the words differently for each possible adversity you might worry about. No problem, just adjust the words until you make them work for you.

What you're waiting for is for your mind to start using the mantra automatically, whenever you have a pessimistic thought. When that happens, you have two completely different predictions in your mind regarding the same issue. Choose to believe the positive one. Choose to talk only about the positive one.

You're done when your mind is automatically converting pessimistic thoughts into optimistic thoughts and you affirm to yourself that you choose to believe the optimistic ones.

If you find the Quick Start practice is too informal and unstructured for you, use the formal practice. Here you'll be guided a little more through the optimistic practices.





## Formal Practice for Being Optimistic

**Estimated time to build this habit: 90 days to 12 months (depending on how pessimistic you normally are).**

### Goal:

Write down on a scale of 1-5 how optimistic you are (1 is hardly ever, 3 is sometimes, and 5 is almost always). \_\_\_\_\_

Write a goal statement, e.g. "I will practice being optimistic until I am comfortable that I can do it habitually."

My goal: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### One-time Practice:

A. Start with the list of things to think about in the chart that follows.

B. Take one item at a time.

- Write down your immediate thoughts about it.
- Create an optimistic assessment based on:

*Bad things most likely won't happen to me; they tend to happen to others.*

*If anything does go wrong, I'll handle it, and get on with my life.*

*I've got a rich, full life; I could lose any single aspect of it and still thrive.*

- Choose to take the optimistic view.

Item and Immediate Thoughts	Optimistic View
Global warming:	
Future taxes:	
Social Security:	
Mad Cow disease:	
Next political party to win:	
Middle East peace:	
Future of Iraq:	
US/European relations:	
Future of the middle class:	

### Daily Practice:

- A. Create your own list of things that you worry about for the future

Take one item per day from your list; imagine a positive and optimistic outcome and choose to think that that will happen.

My Worry List	An Optimistic Assessment

- B. Write one example from the past 24 hours where you found yourself immediately countering a pessimistic thought about the future with an optimistic view. Confirm that you prefer now to think about that issue more positively.

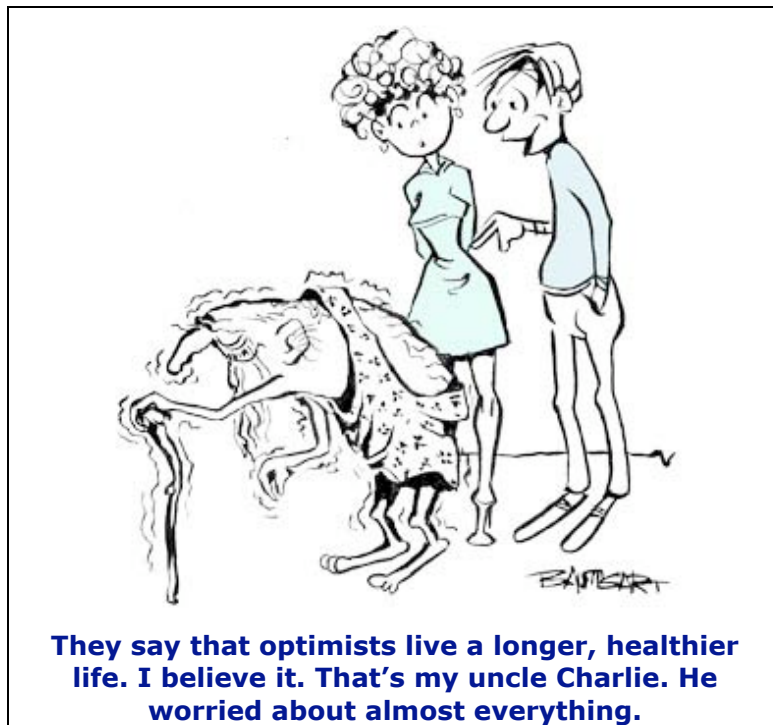
Pessimistic Thought that was Countered

- C. Review your goal.

- D. Continue practicing for at least 90 days.
- E. Share your successes and/or difficulties on the Forum.

**You're done when**

... you are confident that at least half the time you automatically counter any pessimistic thoughts about the future with another more optimistic thought



## Ridiculously Simple Secrets to Great Relationships

You've come a long way. You've learned how relationships are formed. You've studied and practiced positivity, optimism, and appreciating others. What follows is a bit of a recap of those things you've already read about and some new things you may not have learned yet. Even if you've read "Ridiculously Simple Secrets" before, you may notice that you now see these ideas in a new light.

### Attraction

Most relationships begin with attraction. One person is attracted to another. Attraction doesn't need to be mutual. It's a nice bonus when it is. Couples in which neither party found the other attractive upon first meeting have still been able to achieve great relationships. What makes one person attractive to another is unique to each individual. What and whom you will find attractive is imprinted on your brain at a very early age, and reason plays no part.

Attraction is almost useless after a couple advances into a relationship. Some experts suggest that attractiveness is a negative factor, because of the higher incidence of outsiders "hitting on" an especially attractive man or woman who is married. If an especially attractive person ties his or her self-worth to being attractive, it can cause that person difficulty as age diminishes attractiveness.

### Ridiculously Simple Secrets

Don't limit your search for a life partner to people who are especially attractive.

Don't think you won't find a life partner because *you* don't think you're attractive. You *will* match the imprinting for somebody who finds you uniquely attractive. You won't understand why and neither will your partner, but it's still very real.

If you keep finding yourself attracted to individuals who are wrong for you in every other way, ignore the attraction and run swiftly the other way.

If you find a great person, and that person isn't attracted to you, it doesn't mean any future great relationship is doomed. Just skip attraction and go on to courting.

Attraction isn't love. Don't marry too soon after meeting. Attraction will fade. Love will grow.

## Courting

Most relationships advance by the use of courting behaviors. One party or both express their interest in, or attraction to, the other by using age appropriate courting behaviors. In teen-agers, these may include teasing, bumping, touching, being attentive and often around.

In adults, courting rituals may include flirting, frequent phone calls, dating, flowers, gifts, dancing, and other outward demonstrations of interest, attraction and affection. Once the relationship is confirmed by marriage or living together, the courting behaviors and rituals gradually (or quickly) fade away.

### Ridiculously Simple Secrets

Don't think your partner's love has faded because courting behaviors have faded away.

Romance, moonlight, special music, are part of courting. They aren't love either. They merely advance the relationship toward love.

Don't judge a potential partner based on his or her courting behaviors. Courting only serves to advance a relationship; it is quickly left behind.

## Infatuation

If you are lucky, you may experience infatuation on your way to a bonded relationship. Infatuation is a temporary state of madness in which your partner can do no wrong, has no faults, and is perfect in virtually every way. Infatuation is the stuff that poems and songs are written about. Infatuation feels so good, and so "right" that it is very easy to make really unwise decisions. During infatuation, nothing else matters very much. School, goals, dreams, family, friends and work all fade in importance relative to your partner.

Infatuation is not love. Infatuation isn't necessary to achieving a great relationship. It's fun, magical, exhausting, and very temporary. It will fade away. It will soon be gone and gone forever. You can't get it back. You can't have it again with that person. It feels so good that a few people become addicted and change partners frequently so they become "serial infatuators." Again, infatuation is not love.

### **Ridiculously Simple Secrets**

You can have a wonderful, loving, lifelong relationship without ever experiencing infatuation. So, don't think you settled for the wrong partner just because you never felt infatuated.

If you're in a bonded relationship, and find yourself feeling infatuated with somebody else, run like the wind. Don't turn around and don't look back. Infatuation is a form of madness and will make you act crazy. If you give in to it, it will soon leave you, and you'll find you've been a perfect fool.

If you already have a relationship, even if it isn't magical at the moment, infatuation with somebody else is your enemy, not your friend. It is your downfall, not your way out. You can take that to the bank. If your relationship is bad, fix it. If you can't fix it, move on, but deal with your relationship first, and resolve it totally before you give in to attraction or infatuation with someone else.

### **Reality**

Reality is what comes right after infatuation. Reality is where the madness of infatuation fades away and you once again have access to your senses. You see your partner in a new light. Compared to your view during infatuation, the new light is glaring and less pleasant. Many people go into denial of reality because they prefer the distorted wonders of infatuation. But, gradually, even denial can't protect you from the realities of your partner.

Reality is the source of "cold feet" and "second thoughts" that often occur just prior to marriage. To successfully survive reality, the relationship requires that one or both of the partners have "coping" skills. When neither have the skills, the relationship will likely be short lived, with marriage or not.

### **Ridiculously Simple Secrets**

Your partner is not who you thought he/she was when you were in the throes of infatuation.

Your partner is just a normal human being, with the normal number of human flaws and idiosyncrasies.

When reality hits, you're wrong to think that love is gone, or your partner has changed. All that has happened is the madness has faded away.

## Bonding

Bonding refers to the bonds forged by shared experiences. All that may be left from the courting and infatuation phases are the memories of the shared experiences. The strength of forged bonds depends on the strength of the emotions felt during the experience. Infatuation is valuable in that it arouses enormously strong emotions, so the couple share many experiences made extraordinary by being shared while feeling powerful emotions. It is these bonds that — forged during all phases of the relationship process — make up the initial quantity of “Love” felt by the couple. Finally, we have *real* love. And, for the rest of the relationship, that love can be enhanced and will grow through sharing experiences, while feeling positive emotions together. Or, it can be diminished and eroded by sharing negative experiences while feeling emotional pain and hurt.

The bonds of shared positive experiences are the basis of real, adult, mature love. Remembering and replaying the positive bonding moments again and again throughout the duration of the relationship will strengthen those positive bonds, and result in a stronger feeling of love. Love will grow, because each replay of the loving experience adds another bond, and the total grows.

## Ridiculously Simple Secrets

Attraction can feel like love, but isn't. Infatuation can feel like love but, because it always goes away, it can't be love. Courting, dating, flowers, songs, and romance can feel like love because they are forging positive bonds of shared experiences during moments of powerful emotion, but romance is not love.

Love is the sum of all of the positive shared experiences, heightened by powerful emotions. When the relationship is confirmed — by marriage or living committed to one another — the couple has a pool of love which they will increase, or diminish by their future actions.



## Issues

As the relationship proceeds, “issues” will arise. Issues are points of difference between the partners that create bad feelings for one or both of the partners. The partners easily deal with most issues. He puts the toilet seat down because it upsets her to fall in when she backs in, in the dark. She stops hanging her lingerie on the shower curtain rod because it gets in the way when he showers. These are the normal, natural, changes people make when the change doesn’t affect deeply held opinions, self-visions, goals, or life decisions. (In other words, the cost of change is low.)

A second set of issues always arises. These issues are not easily resolved, and in fact, may well be irresolvable. To over simply somewhat, the way the partners deal with the irresolvable issues will determine the long-term fate of the relationship.

## Irresolvable Issues

Irresolvable issues typically stem from ‘life decisions’ or ‘self-images’ that causes the partners to be or behave in ways that conflict with each other. Several examples may help clarify the kinds of issues that are irresolvable.

### The class/no class example

Both partners grew up poor, in trailer parks in the South. Her mother taught her that poverty was a burden that could be handled with dignity. Their trailer was always neat as a pin, and the yard was immaculate. In her early teens she vowed that she would handle life with “dignity and class,” regardless of what her life brought.

He grew up proud to be a “redneck.” He aspired to a truck, a dog, a wife, lots of kids, and a ‘working man’s’ job that would give him time to fish and hunt on the weekends. He held the “suits” in disdain, and he ridiculed anybody that acted like a “yuppy,” or wasn’t a loyal American “working man.”

He and she married, had a few kids, and ran smack into their primary irresolvable issue. She wanted nice things for the house, a neat yard and garden, good manners for the kids, and a mini-van. These were things that she equated with having ‘class’ and living with dignity. These things were important to her because they stemmed from a life decision about who she was and who she always would be.

He thought she was trying to “put on the dog” and “live above her station.” What she wanted conflicted directly with his life decision to be who he was and live the way he thought was ‘right.’ Their individual life decisions were at stake. What made the issue irresolvable was that neither was going to change. The ‘cost’ of change was too great.

### The spend/save example

She grew up in a family that always lived on ‘the edge.’ They lived paycheck to paycheck, and always ended up with more bills than money. Her father spent money on

liquor and poker, and the family suffered. She decided that her life would be different. She would always spend less than she earned, and save diligently for retirement, college for the kids, and a “rainy day.” She vowed never, ever, would she have to deal with bill collectors in her life.

He grew up in a family with a father who was the opposite of hers. His father pinched every penny until it squeaked. The toys, fancy sneakers, and gadgets that his friends had were “unnecessary extravagances,” according to his father, so he had none of them. He couldn’t wait to leave home, earn his own living, and get whatever he wanted and needed, without having to explain or defend his purchases to his father.

When the couple fell in love and married, they both had good educations, good jobs, and earned good incomes. Their irresolvable issue had to do with his spending. He spent more than they earned between them, and ran up big debts with mortgages and fancy cars. She wanted to spend less than they earned and save for the future. They were in constant conflict over the money issue, and it was irresolvable because of their conflicting life decisions. Neither would change, and neither wanted to change.

### **Some issues are irresolvable**

Even if you and your partner can’t imagine that you will have irresolvable issues, you will. Some won’t show up until events occur, like having a child. Issues around the child can seldom be anticipated, but there will likely be some, e.g. how to discipline, etc.

Or, some may occur with the incapacity of a parent. One may feel like they have to take a sick mother to live with them, the other may not.

## **Ridiculously Simple Secrets**

Identify the irresolvable conflict issues that are, or will be in your relationship. Make a go/no-go decision on that issue before marriage, if possible. If you marry in spite of being aware of the issue, then cope with it and don’t waste your breath arguing or fighting about it. In other words, NEVER FIGHT OVER AN IRRESOLVABLE ISSUE.

The duration of your relationship will depend largely on how well your partnership can resolve or accept your differences over issues, whether changeable or irresolvable. So, if you can’t learn to fight successfully, DON’T FIGHT AT ALL!

### **Coping**

Coping is the process of dealing immediately with bad feelings (so they don’t fester and grow), and deciding whether the issue can be resolved with action, or resolved with

negotiation, or whether it must be accepted and/or forgiven. If you learn to cope successfully, you will have bad feeling episodes less often, for a shorter duration, and they erode your collection of loving feelings less.

Shifting from strong negative emotions immediately into a questioning mode, where you engage your mind with questions, will allow you to cope successfully with issues, rather than allowing emotions to rule.

Effective coping will enable you to have fewer, shorter, and milder episodes of bad feelings about your partner.

### **Ridiculously Simple Secret**

Protect your collection of loving feelings about your partner by quickly coping with and resolving any episodes of bad feelings.

### **Marking**

Marking is a process whereby you remember a positive experience shared with your partner, recall it vividly, re-experience the good feelings you had at that time, and engage as many of your senses as possible in marking your memory. You mark it by reminding your partner about it, or telling someone about it, or if alone, just laugh, and smile, and tell yourself about it.

### **Ridiculously Simple Secret**

Figure out a way to keep those happy memories alive.

Marking takes a loving shared experience and makes it larger, or stronger. Marking reinforces the bond, and increases feelings of love for your partner.

### **A Truly Magnificent Relationship**

You can create a truly magnificent relationship by resolving all bad feeling episodes as quickly as possible, and marking all present and past good feeling episodes as strongly as you can. By making a habit of coping and marking, you maximize the benefits of shared good experiences and minimize the damage of shared bad experiences.

The net effect is to enable the bonds of love to grow over time and get stronger and stronger.

## **Ridiculously Simple Secret**

Have as many positive shared experiences with your partner as possible before you marry or commit to live together. The bonds formed by those good, shared experiences builds the bonds of love that will give you something to build on, and protect you from the hazards of reality.

(Everything to this point is covered in excruciating detail in my six e-books in the Metamating Series. Everything from here forward is digested from the extensive research done by the absolutely best expert on Marriage, Dr. John Gottman and his colleagues at the Gottman Institute in Seattle. Dr. Gottman can predict with astounding accuracy how long a marriage will last and whether and when it might end in divorce.)

With apologies to Dr. Gottman, and with the deepest respect for his many books and endless research, I will attempt to make his extensive findings ridiculously simple.

## **Positivity**

Positivity refers to the ratio of positive to negative messages one partner gives the other. The messages can be verbal or physical. Messages can be given by gestures, attending or just listening. Successful marriages, with a very low risk of divorce, maintain a positivity ratio of at least 5 to 1. Negative messages are so damaging that it takes 5 positive messages to repair the damage; seriously negative messages will require even more.

## **Ridiculously Simple Secret**

Give your partner at least 5 times as many positive messages as negative. (Assuming the messages are at the same weight.)

## **Start and End “Issue” Discussions Positively**

Couples with high positivity should find it easy to start ‘issue’ discussions respectfully and with a positive tone. Discussions that start positively have a much better chance of actually achieving a good result. Whether the discussion achieved a successful result or not, it is important that the discussion also end on a positive note.

Couples would be wise to avoid “issue” discussions about issues that are irresolvable. Irresolvable issues are best treated with humor and acceptance, rather than ‘discussions.’

## **Ridiculously Simple Secret**

If you’re determined to have an ‘issue’ discussion, start and end it on a positive note.

## **Marriages**

### **Half of All of Them End in Divorce**

Divorce is an enormous penalty to pay for marital mistakes. Divorce affects far more people than just the two in the relationship. Families, children, neighbors, friends and co-workers are all affected negatively when a marriage breaks up. Sick marriages can be revived. The skills that it takes to make a great marriage can be easily learned and made into habits.

### **Marriages in Decline**

Relationships decline when there is low positivity, and when ‘issue’ discussions start poorly and get worse.

If one or both of the parties are volatile and explosive, issue discussions turn quickly into fights. Fights turn quickly into hurtful, exaggerated, insulting, and degrading affairs that create a very negative, powerfully emotional shared experience.

One partner or both can make the damage worse by replaying the experience over again in memory. In the same way that it is valuable to “mark” good, loving experiences to build loving bonds, it is damaging to ‘mark’ bad, hateful experiences by reliving and remembering them.

## **Ridiculously Simple Secrets**

If your ‘issue’ discussions are hurtful and unproductive, don’t have them.  
(Duh)

If you have a really negative emotionally charged shared experience, resolve the bad feelings as quickly as you regain access to reason. Coping effectively can minimize the damage and slow the decline.

If you’ve been in a fight, and expressed damaging messages, get busy as quick as you can to give enough positive messages to repair the damage.

According to Dr. Gottman, volatile couples who fight explosively with damaging and hurtful messages and strong negative emotions are on track to divorce within 3 to 5 years ... or maybe in the first year.

## **Marriages that are “Cold” Last Longer But Still End up in Divorce**

Sometimes one or both parties will attempt to get back at their partner for negative messages or hurtful ‘issue’ discussions, by withdrawal or withholding. One way to stay out of fights is just not to talk to your partner. Another way to fight without seeming to fight is to simply withhold affection, services, attention, or sexual participation.

Withdrawal and withholding will protect against damaging fights, but they are both negative and defeat the positivity required to make the relationship nourishing and rewarding.

This kind of marriage is most likely to divorce around 12 to 16 years.

### **Ridiculously Simple Secrets**

DON’T FIGHT means more than just avoiding loud and hurtful discussions. It means wisely accepting the differences between you and your partner. Acceptance and forgiveness are the wisest way to cope with ‘issues’ that won’t be resolved by action or negotiation.

If your fights are explosive, emotional and hurtful, you’d better hurry and change things around. You don’t have much time.

If you become aware that you are in a partnership where there is a lot of withdrawal and withholding, you’ve got more time, but you’re still headed for disaster.

## **How do You Turn a Sick Relationship Around?**

Turning a sick relationship around is easy to describe and hard to do. It involves four steps and enormous commitment and persistence.

- Step 1. It may be useful to tell your partner that you recognize you have problems, and you are going to take some steps with hopes of making the relationship better. Tell your partner that you are doing this out of love, and hopes for a better future. Ask your partner to recognize that you will make mistakes and stumble and fall from time to time, but you intend to persist and make the relationship work. It is valuable to free your partner from any blame and take all the responsibility onto yourself.
- Step 2. Begin immediately to practice being positive. Give your partner at least 5 and maybe 8 positive messages for every negative message.

- Step 3. Identify all of the irresolvable issues between you, and practice handling those issues with acceptance, forgiveness, and humor. If your partner demands changes from you, on an irresolvable issue, treat your partner respectfully, decline to discuss it because you are convinced it is irresolvable, and up the positivity and humor level to show an effort to make amends.
- Step 4. Mentally commit to start the relationship over. Remember the love with which you two started out. Mark the bonding experiences that once held you close. Cope wisely with any negative feelings that arise because you are doing all the work. You can restore the relationship to a healthy, loving state — if your partner is willing — with high positivity, few if any negative ‘issue’ discussions, and by marking and helping your partner re-experience the positive experiences with which you bonded.

## Conclusions

- It must seem easier to let a sick relationship slip away to divorce than to turn it around by yourself. That may be why 50% of all marriages end in divorce.
- Divorce is a lousy experience and a terrible answer. Divorce doesn’t teach you the skills you need to make a relationship work (coping, marking, positivity, and identifying irresolvable issues). As a result, you’re not likely to make your next relationship work either. (The divorce statistics for second marriages are even worse than for first marriages.)
- Everything you need to learn, and everything you need to practice has been brought together for you, in one place, along with the experts who can help you if you get stuck. You also have access to a bunch of other people (in the Forum) who are mastering the same skills along with you and understand what you are going through ... and the gift you are giving your partner. (Click here to learn more at HowToBeHappier.com (<http://www.howtobehappier.com>).
- If you learn these skills, and practice them, and your partner still is steering your relationship toward divorce, you will be incredibly well equipped to make your next relationship succeed.

## Summary of All of the Ridiculously Simple Secrets

Don't limit your search for a life partner to people who are especially attractive.

Don't think you won't find a life partner because *you* don't think you're attractive. You *will* match the imprinting for somebody who finds you uniquely attractive. You won't understand why and neither will your partner, but it's still very real.

If you keep finding yourself attracted to individuals who are wrong for you in every other way, ignore the attraction and run swiftly the other way.

If you find a great person, and that person isn't attracted to you, it doesn't mean any future great relationship is doomed. Just skip attraction and go on to courting.

Attraction isn't love. Don't marry too soon after meeting. Attraction will fade. Love will grow.

Don't think your partner's love has faded because courting behaviors have faded away.

Romance, moonlight, special music, are part of courting. They aren't love either. They merely advance the relationship toward love.

Don't judge a potential partner based on his or her courting behaviors. Courting only serves to advance a relationship; it is quickly left behind.

You can have a wonderful, loving, lifelong relationship without ever experiencing infatuation. So, don't think you settled for the wrong partner just because you never felt infatuated.

If you're in a bonded relationship, and find yourself feeling infatuated with somebody else, run like the wind. Don't turn around and don't look back. Infatuation is a form of madness and will make you act crazy. If you give in to it, it will soon leave you, and you'll find you've been a perfect fool.

Your partner is not who you thought he/she was when you were in the throes of infatuation.



Your partner is just a normal human being, with the normal number of human flaws and idiosyncrasies.

When reality hits, you're wrong to think that love is gone, or your partner has changed. All that has happened is the madness has faded away.

Attraction can feel like love, but isn't. Infatuation can feel like love but, because it always goes away, it can't be love. Courting, dating, flowers, songs, and romance can feel like love because they are forging positive bonds of shared experiences during moments of powerful emotion, but romance is not love.

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Identify the irresolvable conflict issues that are, or will be in your relationship. Make a go/no-go decision on that issue before marriage, if possible. If you marry in spite of being aware of the issue, then cope with it and don't waste your breath arguing or fighting about it. In other words, **NEVER FIGHT OVER AN IRRESOLVABLE ISSUE.**

The duration of your relationship will depend largely on how well your partnership can resolve or accept your differences over issues, whether changeable or irresolvable. So, if you can't learn to fight successfully, **DON'T FIGHT AT ALL!**

Protect your collection of loving feelings about your partner by quickly coping with and resolving any episodes of bad feelings.

Figure out a way to keep those happy memories alive.

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**Use the Simple Secrets to  
avoid the relationship minefields.**

## Additional References

*Six e-books: “The Metamating Series”*

*Audio-visual program: “Four Questions and a Map”*

*E-book and e-Workbook: “Four Questions and a Map”*

*E-book: How To Be Happier*

**Also available:**

“Sagery: A User’s Manual for the Mind:” a three-book series by Ken Johnston

**Outside books of interest:**

“Learned Optimism” by Martin Seligman

